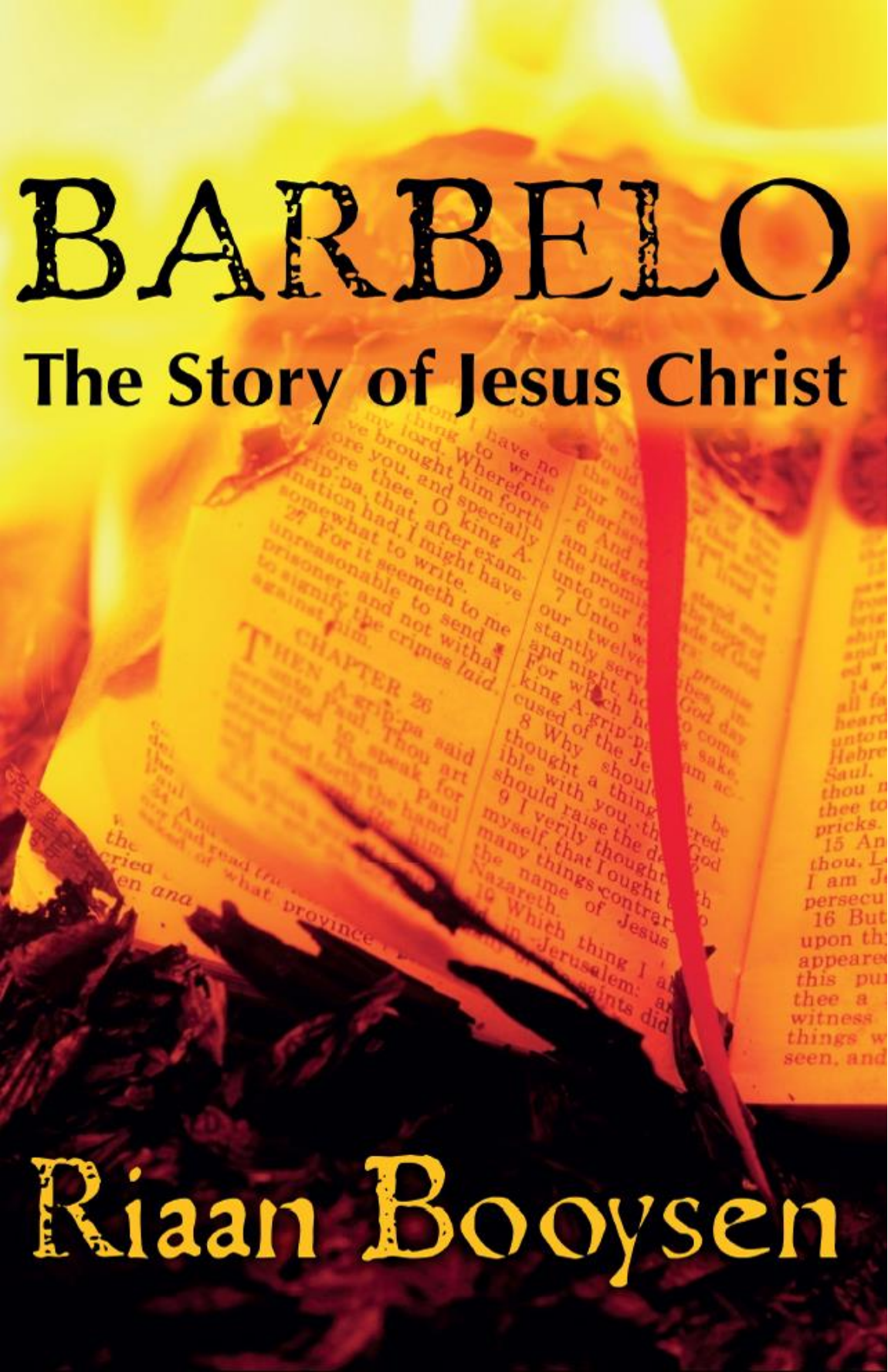
BARBELO
The Story of Jesus Christ
Riaan Booysen

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Also by Riaan Booysen

Thera and the Exodus

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Preface

One of the most difficult decisions a devout believer can ever make is to stop believing. This book—and in fact all of the research I have conducted into the origins of religion—is the direct result of a fateful decision I made many years ago: the decision that I could no longer believe in Jesus Christ.

I was raised in a Christian family, and by the time I reached my late teens, I was as deeply religious and as fervent a follower of Christ as any youth could be. My belief in Christ remained unwavering during my tertiary studies and throughout my early years at work, but over time the questions that had always been nagging in the back of my mind became louder and more persistent: If God loves us all, why would anyone be lost—to burn in hell forever? Why did God create Satan, fully aware of what the consequences would be? In the words of John Collier: "*An omnipotent Deity who sentences even the vilest of his creatures to eternal torture is infinitely more cruel than the cruellest man*." How could God choose to reveal himself to the unsophisticated people who lived two thousand years ago yet be somehow unwilling to do so again today, at a time when we have more questions about Him than ever before? If the earth is only thousands of years old, as many Christians believe, why did God give us dinosaur skeletons and fossils—to deliberately confuse us? Why are we given the ability to think, yet we are forbidden to question? The list is endless. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ somehow remained my best friend, my Saviour.

The turning point came when I sat in church one day and the minister referred to the virgin birth of Christ as predicted by Isaiah (Is. 7:14). I read the NIV comment on this crucial verse, which states that the word translated as "virgin" may refer to a young woman betrothed to Isaiah. I read through the entire passage and realised

that "the sign of Immanuel" described in this chapter of Isaiah had everything to do with Isaiah and his son and absolutely nothing to do with a future Christ. Troubled, I began searching the Old Testament for other prophecies about the virgin birth of Christ. I could not find any. It would seem that Jesus Christ had nothing to do with Jehovah. If Christ was not born of a virgin, he was not the Son of God, and Christianity would pop like a balloon.

To turn my back on Christ was not an impulsive decision. It followed a prolonged personal battle with my own convictions during which I looked for answers in Bible study groups, in Christian apologetics books, in discussions with church ministers, and in various books critical of Christianity. In the end, though, I had no choice but to escape from the clutches of religion. This cost me my marriage and a couple of my closest friendships, but I was free at last—free from Jesus Christ.

For the next couple of years my focus was mainly on my work, but I resolved to begin researching the origins of the concept of God. Starting off as a complete novice in the fields of classical mythology, Egyptology, and all extra-biblical aspects of Christianity, I bought and read whichever books I thought might cast some light on my state of spiritual darkness—a process that continued for many years. I never imagined that I would be able to contribute significantly to these fields of study that were new to me. As time progressed, however, I began formulating and writing my own theories about how Christianity came into being (the topic of this book), the Exodus events (described in my first book, *Thera and the Exodus*), and also how the legend of Atlantis should be interpreted—a book that remains on my to-do list.

I have no doubt that Christians who are open-minded enough to read this book will feel hurt (if not angered) by what I have to say about Christ. I fully understand these emotions, but I would like to reassure my readers that I wrote *Barbelo* not as a vengeful, atheistic attack on Christianity but rather as the conclusion of an objective, scientific investigation into the historicity of Christ.

As far as belief is concerned, I classify myself as an agnostic: maybe there is a God, maybe there isn't. Either way, I do not believe in the concept of "sin", meaning that I do not believe that we, as human beings, can do anything that could be deemed "wrong" by any deity. If God does not exist, we can do whatever we want. When we die, we go to sleep forever, as if having been administered an eternal anaesthetic. We will not be aware that we exist because we will not exist.

If a God actually exists—one who created the universe and that small part of it that we call "us"—then that God must certainly be perfect beyond comprehension. We are only now beginning to understand the scientific world. Someone must have created it all. And if God is perfect, then the logical conclusion is that we must also be perfect, just like every other form of life on earth. In other words, we can do no wrong—we are meant to do the things that we do. Consequently, there is no such thing as "sin"; there is no punishment, no reason to fear God, and no reason to fear death. Of heaven we might not be sure, but there definitely is no hell.

So did I find the origin of the concept of God or, simply put, the origin of God? Of course not, but in the process I began to understand how people may have started to believe in the existence of supernatural beings (or gods). I have no doubt that an ancient, technologically advanced human civilization existed thousands of years ago—the civilization that left scientific wonders all around the world for us to marvel at.

Far from the biblical creation narrative describing how God created the earth and humanity, I am convinced that Genesis merely describes the aftermath of a comet having struck the earth, wiping out almost all human and animal life on the planet. Our ancient ancestors must have become aware of the impending disaster and must have taken refuge in the safest place they could think of: in huge boats in the middle of the ocean, where the boats could ride out the massive swell of the tsunami created by the impact. In other words, they were the biblical Noahs: a person or persons who could

be found in numerous similar legends around the world. When the waters finally receded from the land and the darkness caused by the impact eventually lifted, they resettled on *terra firma*. Here they came into contact with primitive survivors of the catastrophe, who viewed them as gods because of their ability to work and lift massive stones and perform other seemingly supernatural feats.

Today we know that the earth is billions of years old and modern humans, resulting from millions of years of evolution, are at least several hundred thousand years old. There was no instantaneous creation of any thing or of any living being.

To conclude, with *Barbelo* as well as with *Thera and the Exodus*, I have attempted a nearly impossible feat: to write books that the layman can read and follow but that will at the same time address, to the best of my knowledge, the most critical academic issues raised by scholars in the field. The reader will notice that the text is extensively referenced, but these references serve only as record of the source material I used and contain no further notes to the text. I regularly make use of bullets to summarise the key points of a section or chapter in this book, and I use bold text wherever I want to emphasize a particular paragraph, sentence, or word. I trust that you will find *Barbelo* enlightening as it presents a brand-new perspective on the life of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
>
> —John 3:16

According to the Bible, Jesus Christ was the Son of God (Jehovah), who sent his only son to the world to conquer death, which was believed to be the consequence of sin, and to save the human race from eternal condemnation and torture in hell. Jesus was conceived by the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit while she was still betrothed to Joseph, her future husband. Although Joseph, a carpenter, initially had doubts, he married Mary, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem. After King Herod the Great had been informed by three Magi (wise men) from the East that a new king of the Jews had been born in Bethlehem, he attempted to have the infant killed, forcing the holy family to flee to Egypt. They only returned to Israel following the death of Herod.

Jesus Christ preached salvation to all of those who believed in him and performed miracles to convince his followers of his divinity. He encountered strong opposition from the religious establishment of that time but gathered sufficient support to be hailed by the masses as the king who had come in the name of the Lord. Towards the end of his life, he predicted that he would be killed but would conquer death by rising again on the third day. He was arrested and crucified by the Jewish authorities, and his body was placed in a sealed grave. On the third day, he rose from the grave and appeared to several of his disciples before being taken up into heaven forty days later, with

a promise to return within the next couple of generations and judge all of mankind, both dead and alive.

The treatise presented here differs from most previous works on the historicity of Jesus Christ in one fundamental respect—**the universal assumption that Jesus was inherently a good person**. In this treatise it is argued that his teachings and miracles were from the very beginning based on callous deception, and that the kingship he attempted to attain was actually the imperial crown of Judea. When Christ was rejected by the Jews, he and his followers became increasingly violent, and he developed into a psychopathic mass murderer. The culmination of his campaign of violence was the revolt of the Jews against the Romans and the siege and sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. He had given the Jews and the Romans ample reason for hating him, and they must have regarded him as the personification of evil.

My theory about Jesus Christ began to develop when I read *The New Complete Works of Josephus*[1] with the off chance of finding individuals named Joseph and Mary. Josephus was born shortly after the crucifixion of Christ, and it would have been virtually impossible for him not to have known anything about Jesus Christ. Christ is mentioned twice in Josephus's works,[2] but these references are generally assumed and proven in this treatise to be interpolations by unscrupulous Christians who later attempted to prove the historicity of their Lord.

A Joseph-and-Mary connection soon surfaced, although in a time frame significantly earlier than the accepted time of Christ. Joseph, the treasurer of Herod the Great, and his friend Sohemus were instructed to guard Herod's teenage wife Mariamne I during his absence[3] (she is usually referred to as Mariamne I as Herod later married another Mariamne,[4] who is referred to as Mariamne II). Upon his return Mariamne I rejected Herod, who subsequently blamed Sohemus for a breach of trust and had him summarily executed. Mariamne I (her name is later shown to be equivalent to the biblical *Mary*) was tried, convicted, and also executed.

The circumstances of Mariamne's execution are highly suspicious as, in the end, it was her own mother Alexandra who insisted that she should be executed, while all the court officials and even Herod himself were reluctant to do so (see chapter 2). Although not stated as such by Josephus, Mariamne I must have been pregnant (by Joseph) by the time the highly suspicious Herod returned from his trip to Caesar, and that would have been the real reason for the execution of Sohemus. Herod dared not touch Joseph as he was married to a powerful Roman official at that time (see section 2.4). Mariamne gave birth to a son, who, on his return to Israel, would claim to be the legitimate king of the Jews.

A key turning point in my research came when I was stunned by a remark in Colin Wilson's *Atlantis and the Kingdom of the Neanderthals*:

> The Romans issued a wanted poster for Jesus, which still survives, describing him as short (about four foot six), bald-headed, and hump-backed.[5]

This description of Christ appears to match the description of Paul in the apocryphal *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*:

> A man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.[6]

Could Jesus and Paul have been the same person? One of the greatest mysteries associated with modern theories about Christ is—if accepting that he had survived his crucifixion—the question of what became of him afterwards. If Christ had indeed survived his crucifixion, he would not have gone through such an ordeal only to vanish into obscurity. He could hardly have continued to be around as Jesus, since he was supposed to have been taken up into heaven forty days after his resurrection.[7] In this treatise it will be shown that following his

recovery from the crucifixion, Christ left Israel to continue leading his revolution under the guise of the biblical Paul of Tarsus.[8] It will also be shown that Josephus knew him very well but referred to him as the Egyptian who led a failed uprising against the Romans,[9] an accusation brought against Paul during his final arrest.[10] This Egyptian has been identified by several scholars as the person known in apocryphal literature as Simon Magus.[11-13] In other words, it will be argued that Jesus Christ, Paul of Tarsus, and Simon Magus were all one and the same person.

Another key turning point in my research was a statement made by Rupert Furneaux in his book *The Other Side of the Story*, where he discusses the deaths of the rich couple Ananias and Saphira, which occurred in the presence of Simon Peter:

> It can only be inferred that two members of the community, a man and his wife, were executed by Peter for some offence whose nature is unknown.[14]

I recalled having read in Josephus's works of a man called Simon who tortured the rich and plundered their homes. The name of this individual was Simon bar Gioras,[15] and the question that immediately sprang to mind was whether Josephus might have known Simon Peter by that name. This indeed turned out to be the case. Subsequent research systematically revealed the reign of terror conducted by Christ and his followers. Simon Peter was Josephus's Simon bar Gioras, and John the Beloved was John of Gischala,[16] the most savage of all the Jewish rebels, who attempted to drive the Romans from Israel.

In order to establish the accuracy of the treatise presented here, it is imperative to link as many characters in the story of Jesus Christ as possible to historic figures. Specifically, I will also show that Joseph, the father of Christ, later married Mariamne II after Herod divorced her, and that she became the biblical Mary Magdalene.[17,18] Through Josephus's own genealogy, I will endeavour to prove that he not only

knew Christ very well but that he was, in fact, Christ's half-brother by Joseph (the father of Christ) and Mariamne II (Josephus was the brother of Christ, interchangeably called Jose, Joseph, and Josephes in the New Testament and apocryphal texts). Most of the early disciples of Christ were impressionable young teenagers when he appeared on the scene, as was Josephus when he was first introduced to Christ. As he grew older, however, Josephus saw through the deceptions and later did everything in his power (and his works) to disassociate himself from Christ.

To summarise, the theory presented in this treatise is that the person known as Jesus Christ was born from a brief affair between Herod's treasurer Joseph and Mariamne I, Herod the Great's Hasmonean wife. Mariamne I escaped from Herod through a staged execution and raised her son outside Israel, most likely in the East and later in Egypt. When Mariamne I and her son returned to Israel after Herod's death, her son was about thirty years old and had already earned himself the reputation of being a magician, Simon Magus by name.

Despite his legitimate claim to the throne, he was rejected by the Jews and had to turn to violence in order to support his movement and eventually seize power. This made him a fugitive from the Romans, from whom he could only escape by staging his own crucifixion. Having recovered from this carefully orchestrated crucifixion, he continued to lead and expand his rebel force under the assumed name of Paul of Tarsus, up to his final attempt to overthrow the Romans. This, however, failed, and although he escaped the battlefield, he was arrested years later, taken to Rome, and eventually executed. Despite early efforts by the Romans to suppress the falsehoods surrounding Jesus Christ, the teachings originally heard by the crowds, the 'miracles' witnessed by outsiders, and the appearance of the risen Christ to many of his followers ensured that his legacy prevailed, developing into the faith known today as Christianity.

In the text to follow, the reader will encounter a number of individuals of interest with identical names. For clarification, these individuals are:

- Joseph, the father of Christ
- Joseph, Herod's treasurer (argued to be Joseph, the father of Christ)
- Joseph of Arimathea (argued to be Joseph, the father of Christ)
- Joseph, the uncle[19] of Herod the Great, who was also Herod's brother-in-law[20] as he had married Herod's sister Salome
- Joseph ben Gorion (Joseph, son of the 'Old Man,' argued to be the Jewish historian Josephus)
- Joseph Barsabbas (Joseph, son of the 'Old Man,' argued to be the Jewish historian Josephus)
- Joseph, the brother of Christ (also called Josephes, argued to be the Jewish historian Josephus)
- Mary, the mother of Christ
- Mary Magdalene, the companion of Christ
- Mariamne I (the second wife of Herod the Great, argued to be Mary, the mother of Christ)
- Mariamne II (the third wife of Herod the Great, argued to be Mary Magdalene)
- Salome, the sister of Herod the Great
- Salome, one of the female followers of Christ, but not Herod's sister

I

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

> When he was twelve years old, they went up to the feast… the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.… After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed.… When his parents saw him, they were astonished.… 'Son, why have you treated us like this?'
>
> —Luke 2:41–48

> They went up into the temple of the Lord.… And he set her down upon the third step of the altar…and all the house of Israel loved her. And her parents went down marvelling…because the child had not turned back. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord.… And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of the priests, saying…'what then shall we do with her, lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord?'
>
> —The Infancy Gospel of James

The New Testament has surprisingly little to say about the childhood and early adulthood of Jesus Christ. In their Gospels, Mark and John do not mention the infancy of Christ at all, while Matthew[1] relates that Mary was a virgin betrothed to Joseph when she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. God appeared to Joseph in a dream, instructing him to marry her, which he did. She gave birth to the child supposedly in Bethlehem but subsequently had to flee with Joseph and her son, taking refuge in Egypt. Luke adds that the

mother of Christ was related to Elizabeth,[2] the mother of John the Baptist (see section 5.1).

The newborn child was visited by either Magi from the East[3] or shepherds who were told of his birth by a heavenly host of angels.[4] It would appear that one particular detail had survived in oral traditions of the birth of Christ, namely: that he was visited by a specific group of people. It is shown later that the infant Christ and his parents were indeed visited by the Magi but not for the reasons presented in the Gospels.

What is important to note is the apparent lack of information about the childhood of Christ. Matthew states that Christ and his family returned from Egypt to Israel during the reign of Herod Archelaus (4 BCE–6 CE),[5] but according to Luke, Christ's parents had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover every year following his birth,[6] implying that they had not fled to Egypt. Luke then mentions the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple arguing with the priests and, with the simple statement that 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men,' jumps directly to Christ, aged thirty.[7]

1.1 Born in a Cave

It is no secret that there are numerous contradictions in the New Testament. One of the most conspicuous is the difference between the genealogies of Christ as presented by Matthew[8] and Luke[9] (see table 1.1).

Matthew	**Luke**
Eliud	Melki
Eleazar	Levi
Matthan	Matthat
Jacob	Heli
Joseph	Joseph
Jesus Christ	Jesus Christ

Table 1.1. Genealogies of Jesus Christ

These rapidly divergent genealogies must have been attempts by Matthew and Luke to legitimise Christ's claim to be the long-expected Jewish Messiah, who had to come from the bloodline of David.[10] Some have argued that Matthew follows the line of Joseph, his legal father, while Luke follows the line of Mary, his biological mother.[11] Both of these genealogies are nonsensical if the Holy Spirit indeed conceived a son by Mary, as the inclusion of Joseph and any other male ancestor in Christ's genealogy becomes irrelevant.

Matthew records that the Magi located Mary and her child in a house,[12] while Luke relates that Christ was born and placed in a manger, as the inn in Bethlehem supposedly had no room for them.[13] However, most apocryphal accounts state that Christ was born in a cave.

The Infancy Gospel of James:

> They were in the midst of their journey, and Mary said to him, 'Joseph, take me down from the donkey for that which is in me is ready to be born.' He took her down from the donkey and said to her, 'Where shall I take you to shelter your shame? For the place is desolate.' **He found there a cave, and he brought her in** and placed his sons beside her. Then he went out to seek a Hebrew midwife in the country of Bethlehem.…Finding a midwife, he brought her.…The midwife went in and placed Mary in position, and **Salome** examined her virginal nature;[14]

The Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew:

> And when he had thus said, the angel ordered the beast to stand, for the time when she should bring forth was at hand; and he commanded the blessed Mary to come down off the animal, **and go into a recess under**

> **a cavern, in which there never was light, but always darkness, because the light of day could not reach it.** And when the blessed Mary had gone into it, it began to shine with as much brightness as if it were the sixth hour of the day.…Now, when the birth of the Lord was at hand, Joseph had gone away to seek midwives. And when he had found them, he returned **to the cave**, and found with Mary the infant which she had brought forth. And Joseph said to the blessed Mary: I have brought thee two midwives—Zelomi and **Salome**; and they are standing outside before the entrance to the cave, not daring to come in hither, because of the exceeding brightness.[15]

The History of Joseph the Carpenter, supposedly the words of Christ himself:

> **The old man** therefore, righteous Joseph, rose up and took the Virgin Mary and came to Bethlehem, because the time of her bringing forth was at hand. Joseph then inscribed his name in the list; for Joseph the son of David, whose spouse Mary was, was of the tribe of Judah. And indeed Mary, **my mother, brought me forth in Bethlehem, in a cave** near the tomb of Rachel the wife of the patriarch Jacob, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.[16]

Justin Martyr:

> But when the Child was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find a lodging in that village, he took up his quarters **in a certain cave near the village**; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger, and here the Magi who came from Arabia found Him.[17]

Eusebius:

> For he who was 'God with us' had submitted **to be born even in a cave of the earth**, and the place of his nativity was called Bethlehem by the Hebrews.[18]

In this treatise I argue that Christ was the son of Mariamne I (Herod's wife) and Joseph, Herod's treasurer. Herod would have issued an instruction to the public to come forward with any information regarding the whereabouts of Mariamne's son. Mariamne would have to have given birth to him in a place where they could not be recognised or located, and it is therefore very likely that the child was indeed born in a cave on someone's private property, possibly even Joseph's. The Salome who was present at Christ's birth is not mentioned in the canonical Gospels. She would most likely have been Salome, Herod's sister, as she must have been part of the plan to stage Mariamne's death and her escape from Herod (see chapter 2).

1.2 The Lost Years of Jesus

Much has been speculated about the life of Christ between the ages of twelve and thirty years, of which no record exists. This period has become known as the 'lost years' of Christ and has become the subject of a number of books.[19-21] A careful analysis of the information that we have on the early years of Christ, however, reveals that the 'missing years' actually began with Mariamne's 'execution.' According to Luke:

> **And the child grew and waxed strong**, full of wisdom: and the grace of God was in him. And his parents went every year to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the pasch. And **when he was twelve years old**, they **went up into Jerusalem**, according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus

remained in Jerusalem. And **his parents** knew it not. And thinking that he was in the company, they came a day's journey and **sought him** among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And not finding him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that, **after three** days, they found him **in the temple**, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. **And all that heard him were astonished** at his wisdom and his answers. And seeing him, they wondered. And his mother said to him: Son, why have you done so to us? Behold your father and I have sought you sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business? And they understood not the word that he spoke unto them.[22]

There are similarities relating to the time spent in the temple by both Jesus and Mary. According to *The Infancy Gospel of James*, Mary was raised in the temple:

And the child [Mary] grew strong day by day; and when she was six months old, her mother [Anna] set her on the ground.…And when she was a year old, Joachim made a great feast, and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and all the people of Israel.…And the child was three years old, and Joachim said: Let us take her up to the temple of the Lord,…and Joachim said: Invite the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them stand with the lamps burning, that the child may not turn back, and her heart be captivated from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they went up into the temple of the Lord. And the priest received her, and

kissed her, and blessed her, saying: The Lord has magnified thy name in all generations. In thee, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel. And he set her down upon the third step of the altar, and the Lord God sent grace upon her; and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.

And her parents went down marvelling, and praising the Lord God, because the child had not turned back. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there, and she received food from the hand of an angel. And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of the priests, saying: Behold, Mary has reached the age of twelve years in the temple of the Lord. What then shall we do with her, lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord?

The Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew likewise relates:

After these things, her nine months being fulfilled, Anna brought forth a daughter, and called her Mary. And having weaned her in her **third year**, Joachim, and Anna his wife, **went together to the temple** of the Lord to offer sacrifices to God, and placed the infant, Mary by name, in the community of virgins, in which the virgins remained day and night praising God. And when she was put down before the doors of the temple, **she went up the fifteen steps so swiftly**, that she did not look back at all; nor did she, as children are wont to do, seek for her parents. **Whereupon her parents, each of them anxiously seeking for the child, were both alike astonished, until they found her in the temple**, and the priests of the temple themselves wondered.

The stories of the boy Christ in the temple and of Mary in the temple have the following in common:

- Both Mary and Christ are mentioned as being in or at the temple when they were twelve years old.
- The number three is mentioned in three accounts (three days, third step, and third year).
- The parents of both Christ and Mary went to the temple (Jerusalem) for a feast or sacrifice.
- Christ remained in the temple, while Mary 'did not turn back.'
- The parents of both Christ and Mary anxiously searched for their child.
- Both children were found in the temple.
- In both instances the parents were 'astonished.'

Given the background outlined in this treatise, one has to conclude that the story of Mary in the temple was adopted by Luke—or more likely by Christ and his mother decades later—in order to relate something about the childhood of Christ.

One has to ask whose children would have been selected to be raised in the temple. These children would have to have been very special, most likely only royal children and the children of the high priest. In fact, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* further claims that:

> Ever since this temple was built by Solomon, there have been in it virgins, the daughters of kings and the daughters of prophets, and of high priests and priests; and they were great, and worthy of admiration.

In Mariamne's case, both qualifications apply as she was of royal descent, and her grandfather, John Hyrcanus II, had served as high priest from 76 to 67 BCE and again from 63 to 40 BCE.[23,24] Her brother Aristobulus III had also served as high priest for about a year (36

BCE).[25,26] As stated in *The Infancy Gospel of James*, all of Israel knew her, and the entire nation would have watched her growing up as a royal princess.

Mariamne was 'executed' in the year 29 BCE,[27] by which time Christ had just been born. Word of the death of Herod the Great would have taken some time to have reached Christ and his mother, and it is possible that they returned to Israel several years later, around 1 or 2 CE, when Christ was about thirty years old. In other words, we know nothing about the first three decades of the life of Christ, and he arrived in Israel as a complete stranger.

1.3 The Star of Bethlehem

One of the most enigmatic stories of the New Testament is that of the Magi (or wise men of the East), who followed a star to pay tribute to the newborn king of the Jews as related by Matthew:

> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and **all Jerusalem with him**.…Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.' After they had heard the king, they went on their way, **and the star they had seen in the East went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was**. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **On coming to the house**, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him

> with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.[28]

This story is not mentioned in the other Gospels but is repeated with a slightly different slant in the apocryphal *The Infancy Gospel of James*:

> And there was a great commotion in Bethlehem of Judaea, for Magi came, saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him. And when Herod heard, he was much disturbed, and sent officers to the Magi. And he sent for the priests, and examined them, saying: How is it written about the Christ? Where is He to be born? And they said: In Bethlehem of Judaea, for so it is written.…And he examined the Magi, saying to them: What sign have you seen in reference to the king that has been born? And the Magi said: We have seen a star of great size shining among these stars, and obscuring their light, so that the stars did not appear; and we thus knew that a king has been born to Israel, and we have come to worship him. And Herod said: Go and seek him; and if you find him, let me know, in order that I also may go and worship him. And the Magi went out. **And, behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them until they came to the cave, and it stood over the top of the cave.** And the Magi saw the infant with His mother Mary; and they brought forth from their bag gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by the angel not to go into Judaea, they went into their own country by another road.

Doubt exists whether such an event ever occurred, and it is widely recognised that the author of Matthew may deliberately have

introduced the story as the supposed fulfilment of the prophecy of Balaam that 'a star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel.'[29]

In order to fulfil yet another prophecy, Christ had to be born in Bethlehem,[30] which certainly must be the motive behind the story of the star of Bethlehem. Even so, accepting henceforth that such an event did occur in some way or another, the story of the star of Bethlehem raises many questions. What was so special about this star that caused the Magi to interpret it as a sign of any kind—not to mention that it heralded the birth of the king of the Jews? Who were the Magi? Were they located in the East when they first saw the star or in Israel when they saw the star rising in the east? Did the star guide them from the East to Bethlehem or to Bethlehem only from Jerusalem, where they were questioned by Herod? Why did Herod and his court not notice this particularly bright star?

Much has also been speculated about the star itself. Suggestions of its identity include Venus, Halley's and other comets, supernovas, and the conjunction of planets.[31,32] However, virtually no consideration appears to have been given to the practical aspects of following a star in order to locate a specific place below it. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* goes as far as to state that:

> The position of a fixed star in the heavens varies at most one degree each day. No fixed star could have so moved before the Magi as to lead them to Bethlehem; neither fixed star nor comet could have disappeared, and reappeared, and stood still. Only a miraculous phenomenon could have been the star of Bethlehem,[33]

thereby recognising some practical aspects of the problem but ultimately having to resort to divine intervention as an explanation for how such a star could have existed. The latter possibility is not considered here.

Mathematical Analysis of the Star of Bethlehem

From Matthew's account we can deduce that the Magi had not followed the star to either Jerusalem or Bethlehem, but they were sent to the latter by Herod because of the prophecy that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the new king of the Jews. In this section I address, from a mathematical perspective, the physical problem of locating any specific place in Bethlehem by following a star.

Looking Straight Up

For argument's sake we will assume that a particularly bright star did indeed 'stop' over Bethlehem, and the movement of all observable celestial objects was frozen for that period of time (the rotation of Earth around its axis stopped, and its travel around the sun halted). We now need to define in mathematical terms how the Magi could have located Christ's place of birth by looking upwards at the star above them. The problem can be depicted as shown in figure 1.1, in which an object (O) is located at a distance (d) from Earth, of which the radius is *R*. The angle θ denotes the angular offset between the object (O) and a person located at point P_2, as measured from the centre of Earth (C). The angle α represents the angle at which this person would observe the object (O). At point P_1, the point directly below the object (O), $\alpha = 0°$. The distance (t) along the surface of Earth between points P_1 and P_2 is given by $t = R\theta$, θ in radians.

Elementary trigonometry applied to figure 1.1 yields the equation

$$\tan \alpha = (R+d) \sin \theta / ((R+d) \cos \theta - R)$$
$$\approx \tan \theta, \qquad d \gg R \text{ and } \theta \text{ small}$$

which implies that

$$\alpha \approx \theta = t/R, \ \alpha \text{ and } \theta \text{ in radians}$$

from which the angle α can now be calculated. In practical terms the angle α defines how accurately one needs to look 'up' in order to get within a distance t from point P_1.

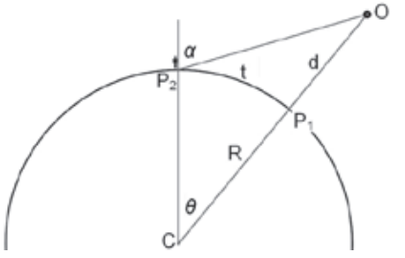

Figure 1.1. Mathematical definition of parameters for a person observing an object in space

Apart from the sun and the moon, the brightest celestial object in the sky is the planet Venus, also called the Morning Star or Evening Star because of the time of day it is brightest.[34] The minimum distance between Earth and Venus is approximately 38.2 million kilometres (d in figure 1.1), while the farthest distance between Venus and Earth is 261 million kilometres.[35] Proxima Centauri, the nearest true star, is about 4.2 light-years (3.97×10^{13} km) from the sun.[36] The average radius of Earth (R in figure 1.1) is a mere 6,371 kilometres by comparison,[37] which means that for whichever celestial object the Magi were following, the simplified equation above can be used for calculations.

In terms of the mathematical problem, we now need to quantify numerically what 'looking straight up' would mean, as this presumably was how the Magi found the birthplace of Christ. If 'up' is defined by a circular area around P_1, within which a maximum deviation of one degree from 'directly above' is allowed ($\alpha \leq 1°$), it would translate to a circular area of radius $t = R\alpha \approx 111$ kilometres, or 38,844 square kilometres! The maximum width of Israel is 112 kilometres, but through Bethlehem it is only about eighty-five kilometres, significantly less than what a view angle of 1° would allow. If we were able to tell what 'directly above' us is with an accuracy of 0.1°, the radius would reduce to 11.1 kilometres and the surface area to 388 square kilometres. For a person to identify a specific place (like a house) at

point P_1, he or she will probably have to come within fifteen metres of that place, meaning $t \leq 15$ m. In this case we will have to be able to discern what is 'above us' with a maximum error of 0.000135°! Such accuracy is practically impossible to achieve, even with the most sophisticated measurement equipment available today.

The Rotation of Earth

Assuming that it is indeed possible to look upwards with an accuracy of 0.0001°, we now need to take into account the practical problem of the rotation of Earth around its axis. As before, we will assume that all observable celestial bodies are motionless relative to each other and specifically relative to Earth, which is only allowed to rotate around its axis. If we were to look down at Earth from a star located directly above Bethlehem (as shown in figure 1.2), Bethlehem would appear at the centre of the circle that represents Earth. As Earth rotates on its axis, we would observe Bethlehem moving along the trajectory indicated in figure 1.2, all the way around until it reaches this same position twenty-four hours later. The second trajectory on the diagram represents the equator.

Earth rotates at an angular velocity of one revolution per day, and a point on the equator will travel a distance of $2\pi R = 2\pi$ (6,371) = 40,030 kilometres in twenty-four hours (along the equator trajectory in figure 1.2), at a speed of 1,668 km/h. Bethlehem is located at latitude 31.7°N and will therefore travel a distance of $2\pi R \cos(31.7°)$ = 34,058 kilometres in twenty-four hours, at a speed of 1,419 km/h, or 394 m/s (the speed of sound, Mach 1,[38] is approximately 340 m/s at sea level). This, then, is the speed at which a person in Bethlehem will move through the spot that is directly below us, looking down from the stationary star to the rotating Earth.

Figure 1.2. View of Earth from a star located directly above Bethlehem

If we want to locate the birthplace of Christ, let us allow the spot to have a radius of 15 m corresponding to the upwards look angle of ±0.0001°. We find that a person will remain within that spot for 2 x 15 / 394 = 0.076 seconds. The human eye takes about 0.3 to 0.4 seconds to blink, which means that if you are looking up at the star, waiting for the moment that you will be directly below it within 0.0001°, you will miss that moment in less than the blink of an eye. Five seconds later you will have moved almost two kilometres past that spot. Conversely, if you want to 'follow' the star to the birthplace of Christ—i.e., remain directly below the star all the time—you will have to travel at a speed of 1,419 km/h, and you will have to step on the brakes rather heavily once you get to Bethlehem!

Other Considerations

We have so far assumed that it is possible for Venus to pass directly over Bethlehem at some point in time. In reality we have to take into account the orbit of Earth around the sun and the movement of the other planets, stars, comets, and so forth in our galaxy relative to Earth. It can be shown that, for all intents and purposes, it

is impossible for Venus to ever pass directly over Bethlehem.[39] The principles applied here for Venus are equally valid for any other star, comet, or conjunction of planets to be identified as the star of Bethlehem. One can therefore safely conclude that the Magi could not have followed a star to reach Bethlehem, not to mention a specific place in Bethlehem.

Whence, then, the Story of the Magi?

Based on this analysis, it is clear that the biblical story of the Magi following a star to locate a newborn king is absurd, from the scientific perspective that a star in the sky could in no way have signified to them that a new king of the Jews had been born. The most likely involvement of the Magi from the East in the nativity story is discussed in chapter 3, where it is argued that Joseph had become interested in and converted to their faith (Zoroastrianism). Herod had instructed Joseph to guard his beautiful young wife during his absence abroad, and through this contact, Joseph must have lured her to this new faith. The impressionable young Mariamne appears to have embraced this new religion and ultimately Joseph as well, leading to her pregnancy. The Magi may simply have been astronomers visiting Herod, and the fact that in the biblical account they left Israel by an unknown route suggests that they had secretly smuggled Mariamne (Mary) out and had taken her with them. The gifts she had received from them, from Joseph, and probably from several other court officials were intended to sustain her during her new life away from Israel. The lives of the Magi themselves would have been at risk as well as they had played a significant role in Mariamne's escape from Herod. Whatever the reason for their presence in Israel, the Magi link Mary directly to Herod the Great, which would not have been possible if she had been a young woman unknown to anyone in Israel.

According to the Koran, Mary 'withdrew from her family to a place in the East,' conceived Christ, and 'retired with him to a remote place.'[40] Although the text is apparently interpreted as a chamber in

the East or a chamber facing east, it is more likely that the author of the text recalled that Mary had withdrawn to a remote place in the East, which would have been the land of the Magi—either Persia[41] or ancient Sumer[42]—whose language continued to be used in Mesopotamia for cultural purposes until the first century CE.[43] The importance of the Sumerian connection is discussed in sections 3.3 and 9.2.

Christ's upbringing in the East is confirmed by Africanus:

> Christ first of all became known from Persia. For nothing escapes the learned jurists of that country, who investigate all things with the utmost care. The facts, therefore, which are inscribed upon the golden plates, and laid up in the royal temples, I shall record; for it is from the temples there, and the priests connected with them, that the name of Christ has been heard of.[44]

From this place in the East, wherever exactly that might have been, Christ and his mother appear to have moved to Egypt before returning to Israel following the death of Herod the Great. Mariamne's sole purpose would have been to restore her son as the king of Judea and of the Jews.

2

Joseph, Herod's Treasurer, and Mariamne I, the Parents of Jesus Christ

> *Fabri aut quaestuariae filius* (The son of a carpenter or a treasurer)
>
> —Tertullian, *De Speculatis*

Apart from the names of his father and mother, fairly little is known about the lineage of Jesus Christ. In their Gospels, Matthew[1] and Luke[2] attempt to reconstruct a family tree through Joseph, with very little success. According to Matthew, the line from Jesus four generations back in time was Jesus, Joseph, Jacob, Matthan, and Eleazar, while Luke lists the corresponding names as Jesus, Joseph, Heli, Matthat, and Levi. The motive of the Gospel writers with these genealogies appears to have been to prove that Joseph was a descendant of David, a prerequisite for the Messiah expected by the Jews.[3] Both lineages are nonsensical, as Christ was supposedly fathered by God through his Holy Spirit and not by Joseph or any other male.

Christ's grandfather is named as Jacob and Heli, but no generally accepted explanation for this discrepancy appears to have been proposed to date. The names Matthan and Matthat may refer to the same person, but further back in time, the genealogies of Matthew and Luke rapidly diverge. There can be little doubt that neither Matthew nor Luke had any factual evidence for drawing up their genealogies preceding Matthan/Matthat.

If any historical document should be expected to make reference to the existence of Jesus Christ, it would be found in the works of the Jewish historian Josephus, also known as Flavius Josephus,[4] who was, according to his own testimony, born in 37 CE.[5] If his own chronology

is to be believed and if the religious revolution spearheaded by Christ had actually occurred, Josephus must definitely have known about those events. The two references to Christ that appear in Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*,[6] often referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum*, are believed by some scholars to be forgeries by Christian copyists who attempted to provide proof of the existence of Christ, while others believe that it contains Christian interpolations of Josephus's authentic material about Christ.[7]

When I began studying Josephus's history of the Jews, the thought occurred to me that Josephus could also be expected to have known about Joseph and Mary, the parents of Christ. A search of Josephus's works does indeed reveal one potential connection: Joseph, Herod's treasurer, who, with Sohemus, was instructed by Herod to guard his Hasmonean wife Mariamne during Herod's absence:

> Now Herod…hurried to Caesar;…But as to Mariamne his wife, because of the misunderstanding between her and his sister, and his sister's mother, which made it impossible for them to live together, he placed her at Alexandrium, with Alexandra her mother, and left his treasurer Joseph and Sohemus of Iturea to take care of that fortress. These two had been very faithful to him from the beginning, and were now left as a guard to the women. They also had it in charge, that if they should hear any mischief had befallen him, they should kill them both, and, as far as they were able, to preserve the kingdom for his sons, and for his brother Pheroras.[8]

The women, however, soon learned about their fate should Herod not return:

> However, when he came into his kingdom again, he found his house all in disorder, and his wife Mariamne

> and her mother Alexandra very uneasy; for as they supposed (what was easy to be supposed) that they were not put into that fortress [Alexandrium] for the security of their persons, but as into a garrison for their imprisonment, and that they had no power over anything, either of others or of their own affairs, they were very uneasy; and Mariamne supposing that the king's love to her was but hypocritical, and rather pretended (as advantageous to himself) than real, she looked upon it as fallacious. **She also was grieved that he would not allow her any hopes of surviving him, if he should come to any harm himself**. She also recollected what commands he had formerly given to Joseph**, insomuch that she tried to please her keepers, and especially Sohemus, as well apprised how all was in his power**. And at the first Sohemus was faithful to Herod, and neglected none of the things he had given him in charge; but when the women, by kind words and liberal presents, had gained his affections over to them, he was by degrees overcome, **and at length revealed to them all the king's injunctions,** and this on that account mainly, that he did not so much as hope he would come back with the same authority he had before; Rather he thought he should both escape any danger from him, Herod, and supposed that he did hereby much gratify the women, who were likely not to be overlooked in the settling of the government; and that they would be able to make him abundant recompense, since they must either reign themselves, or be very near to him that should reign. He had a further ground of hope also, that though Herod should have all the success he could wish for, and should return again, he could not contradict his wife in what she desired, **for he knew that the king's fondness for his wife was inexpressible**. These were the motives

> that drew Sohemus to reveal what injunctions had been given him. **So Mariamne was greatly displeased to hear that there was no end of the dangers she was under from Herod, and was greatly uneasy at it, and wished that he might obtain no favors [from Caesar], and esteemed it almost an insupportable task to live with him any longer; and this she afterward openly declared, without concealing her resentment.**[9]

Mariamne's refusal to live with Herod any longer is echoed in the Talmud, where she threatens to kill herself:

> Herod was the slave of the Hasmonean house, and had set his eyes on a certain maiden [of that house]. One day he heard a Bath Kol say, 'Every slave that rebels now will succeed.' So he rose and **killed all the members of his master's household**, but spared that maiden. When she saw that he wanted to marry her, she went up on to a roof and cried out, Whoever comes and says, **I am from the Hasmonean house, is a slave, since I alone am left of it, and I am throwing myself down from this roof**. **He preserved her body in honey for seven years**. Some say that he had intercourse with her, others that he did not. According to those who say that he had intercourse with her, his reason for embalming her was to gratify his desires. According to those who say that he did not have intercourse with her, his reason was that people might say that he had married a king's daughter.[10]

The statement that he preserved her body in honey for seven years matches Josephus's account that Herod had preserved her jealously during the seven to eight years (37–29 BCE)[11] of their marriage. Her threat to kill herself must have been made when she learned the truth

about her fate in case he should be killed. It was actually not the first time that Herod had given such an instruction.

Herod had Mariamne's brother Aristobulus murdered some time before, prompting a suicidal Alexandra to write to Cleopatra and causing Herod to be summoned by Antony for an explanation. Herod did not expect to survive, and before he departed, he instructed his uncle Joseph (who was also the husband of Herod's sister Salome but not the same person as Joseph, Herod's treasurer) to kill Mariamne should he, Herod, not survive his visit to Antony.[12] On that occasion, Joseph (of Salome) disclosed Herod's order for her execution to Mariamne, about which she confronted Herod when he returned. The instruction was given to Joseph only, so Herod realised that Joseph had betrayed his trust and had him executed. The same would happen again when Herod ordered Sohemus and his treasurer Joseph to kill Mariamne should he not return from his visit to Caesar.

Upon his return from Caesar,[13] Herod found his wife hostile, and she accused him of having murdered her father and brother and refused his sexual advances. Salome also insinuated that Mariamne had planned to poison Herod. To verify this Herod had Mariamne's most faithful eunuch tortured. The eunuch denied any knowledge of a plot to have Herod poisoned but revealed that Mariamne's hatred of him (Herod) was due to something Sohemus had told her. Herod immediately suspected that Sohemus had told Mariamne about his instruction to have her and her mother killed upon his own death, and for this betrayal, according to Josephus, he ordered Sohemus to be executed:

> Herod cried out aloud and said that Sohemus, who had been at all other times most faithful to him, and to his government, would not have betrayed what injunctions he had given him, unless he had had a nearer conversation than ordinary with Mariamne. So he gave order that

> Sohemus should be seized on and slain immediately; but he allowed his wife to take her trial.

Mariamne was tried at court and sentenced to death, but Herod and other members of the court pleaded for a stay of execution. Salome and her party, however, demanded an immediate execution, as did Mariamne's own mother Alexandra. Mariamne accepted her fate without showing any emotion:

> When Alexandra observed how things went, and that there were small hopes that she herself should escape the like treatment from Herod, **she changed her behavior to quite the reverse of what might have been expected from her former boldness**, and this after a very indecent manner; for out of her desire to show how entirely ignorant she was of the crimes laid against Mariamne, she leaped out of her place, **and reproached her daughter in the hearing of all the people**; and cried out that she had been an ill woman, and ungrateful to her husband, **and that her punishment came justly upon her for such her insolent behavior**, for that she had not made proper returns to him who had been their common benefactor. And when she had for some time acted after this hypocritical manner, and been **so outrageous as to tear her hair**.
>
> …for at the first she gave her [Alexandra] not a word, nor was discomposed at her peevishness, and only looked at her, yet did she out of a greatness of soul discover her concern for her mother's offense, and especially for her exposing herself in a manner so unbecoming her; but as for herself, **she went to her death with an unshaken firmness of mind**, **and without changing the color of her face**, and thereby evidently discovered the nobility of her descent to the spectators, even in the last moments of her life.

> And thus died Mariamne, a woman of an excellent character, both for chastity and greatness of soul; but she wanted moderation, and had too much of contention in her nature; **yet had she all that can be said in the beauty of her body**, **and her majestic appearance in conversation**

It was this very 'majestic appearance in conversation' that led to strife between her and Herod:

> As for her, she was in other respects a chaste woman, and faithful to him; **yet she was a woman somewhat rough in nature, and treated her husband imperiously enough**, because she saw he was so fond of her as to be enslaved to her. She did not also consider seasonably with herself that she lived under a monarchy, and that she was at another's disposal, **and accordingly would behave herself after a saucy manner to him**, which yet he usually put off in a jesting way, and bore with moderation and good temper. She would also expose his mother and his sister openly, on account of the meanness of their birth, and would speak unkindly of them, insomuch that there was before this a disagreement and unpardonable hatred among the women, and it was now come to greater reproaches of one another than formerly, which suspicions increased, and lasted a whole year after Herod returned from Caesar[14]

It should be noted that Herod practically became insane with grief after the loss of Mariamne,[15] which may have been the origin of the Talmudic legend that he had preserved her body in honey and even had intercourse with her corpse (a rumour repeated by some but denied by others). Herod frequently called for her and would 'lament for her in a most indecent manner,' on which Josephus does not elaborate.

When I first read the account of Mariamne's demise, the following factors seemed to preclude the possibility that this Joseph and Mariamne were the biological parents of Jesus Christ:

- There is no mention that Mariamne was suspected of committing adultery during Herod's absence—in other words, no mention of her being pregnant.
- The time frame is incorrect—Mariamne was executed in 29 BCE,[16] contrary to the generally accepted belief that Christ was born around 4 BCE.[17]
- Mariamne's trial took place more than a year after Herod had returned from Caesar—by that time the baby Jesus would have been born already.
- Joseph was Herod's treasurer and not a carpenter, and Mariamne was a married woman.
- Mariamne reportedly was executed and could therefore not have been the Mary who returned to Israel with her son Jesus.

However, from Josephus's account of the death of Mariamne, some important observations can be made that suggest that there may be more to this story than meets the eye. **There was no way out for Mariamne.** She possibly faced death at the hands of Herod, both for her transgression and his instruction for her execution should he be killed by his enemies (a definite possibility). On her side, she threatened to kill herself rather than to allow Herod to touch her again. Not only did she have reason to fear Herod but she was also convinced that he had orchestrated the murders of her father (Alexander of Judea) and her brother (Aristobulus).

The only way to escape this unbearable situation would have been for Mariamne to die or to escape. She could not simply go into hiding, as Herod's tyranny would have ensured that she would eventually be found—he would simply have had everyone tortured until she was found. The only means of escaping Herod permanently would be to

fake her own death and disappear. For this escape to succeed, she only needed the cooperation of the guards and her executioners, all of whom who would have been sympathetic towards this beautiful teenager. Several points must be considered in this situation.

- Mariamne appears to have been extremely popular with all who knew her and indeed with the entire country, as claimed in the apocryphal sources quoted earlier. Would those in Herod's palace have been prepared to execute a beautiful young girl who was being abused by a madman?
- According to Josephus, Alexandra turned against her daughter during the trial, fearing that she, too, might be found guilty. Would any mother ever demand that her beautiful young daughter be executed in order to save herself from a fate she could not even be sure of?
- Mariamne accepted her death sentence without showing any fear, suggesting that she knew she had nothing to fear. It should be noted that Josephus does not elaborate on how Mariamne was executed. However, in what appears to be an early version of his work, the *Sepher Josippon*,[18] it is recorded that Mariamne (Marimi) was followed by 'all the women of the city' on her way to her place of execution, 'the high street in the city,' which was the marketplace. She 'bore her neck without fear' and was beheaded. In this document it is claimed that Mariamne was executed directly after the execution of Joseph, Salome's husband, which does not agree with Josephus's complete rendition of this part of Jewish history. If Mariamne had to disappear without raising Herod's suspicions, there would have been no better way than to have had her escorted publicly to her place of execution, which would have been a secluded place with only a few witnesses, those who assisted her in her escape. The greater the deception, the smaller the chance that her escape could be uncovered. It is also possible that the author of the *Josippon* merely

assumed that she had been beheaded at the marketplace, where the lives of the perceived enemies of Herod ended. The *Josippon* is discussed further in section 2.3.

- During the trial and ultimate execution of Antipater, Herod's own son, it was claimed that Salome was the one who had plotted against Herod, and that she was the one who showed clemency towards those whom Herod had ordered to be executed upon his death.[19] It would appear that everyone in Herod's household whom he suspected of being disloyal was executed. Salome lost her own husband (Joseph) because of Herod's paranoia, a deed for which she may never have forgiven him, despite Josephus's opinion that she had accused Joseph of adultery (and by implication sought his demise).[20] It is certainly possible, if not likely, that when Herod's true murderous colours became obvious, Salome began colluding with Alexandra to save her (Alexandra's) children. She would have falsely claimed that Mariamne plotted to poison Herod—to ensure her death sentence and thereby facilitate Mariamne's escape from Herod through a staged execution.
- Only Sohemus was executed—Joseph somehow escaped this punishment. It is argued in section 2.4 that Joseph was the son-in-law of a public Roman official called Caius Vibius Pansa, and this effectively made him a Roman citizen. Herod would not have dared touch him without facing execution himself.
- When Christ was crucified, a notice of the accusation against him was nailed to the cross, reading 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'[21] As Mariamne's son, he would indeed have been a prospective king of the Jews. For what other reason could he possibly have been called this?

Having studied many of the apocryphal and other texts relating to the birth of Christ, I could come to no other conclusion than that Joseph, Herod's treasurer, and Mariamne were indeed the parents of Jesus Christ, as I will endeavour to prove.

2.1 The Infancy Gospel of James and Related Texts

Although nothing is said of Mary's parents in the Bible, several apocryphal texts survived censorship to give us more information about Joseph, Mary, and the circumstances under which Christ was born. Of these, *The Infancy Gospel of James* is one of the most important.

According to this document, Mary's father was a very rich man called Joachim, who wanted to bring an offering to the Lord. As he and his wife Anna had no children, a priest called Rubim refused to accept the offering, upon which Joachim retired to the desert, where he fasted for forty days and forty nights. His wife Anna also prayed to God, who answered their prayers, and Mary was born nine months later.

When she was one year old, Joachim prepared a feast and invited 'the high priests, the priests, the scribes, the elders of the council, and all the people of Israel.' Mary was consecrated to and eventually grew up in the temple:

> **When she was twelve years old,** there took place a conference of the priests, saying: 'Behold, Mary has become twelve years old in the Temple of Lord our God. What, therefore, shall we do with her, lest she defile the sanctuary of the Lord?' The high priests said to Zacharias, 'You stand at the altar of the Lord. Enter and pray concerning her; and whatever the Lord may reveal to you, this let us do.' The priest entered the Holy of Holies, taking the vestment with the twelve bells, and he prayed concerning her. And behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, saying, 'Zacharias, Zacharias, go out and **call together the widowers of the people**, and let each of them bring a rod; and to whomever the Lord God shows a sign, **to this one shall she be his wife**. The heralds therefore went forth through the whole Jewish countryside and sounded the trumpet of the Lord, and all came running.

The story continues with Joseph, a widower with children of his own, being chosen to receive the Virgin Mary '**as his ward.**' Joseph initially refused, saying:

> **I have sons**, and **I am an old man**, but she is a young maiden—lest I be a laughing stock to the children of Israel.

Joseph eventually succumbed to pressure and accepted the task, although with trepidation:

> Joseph, frightened, received her as his ward; and Joseph said to her: 'Mary, I have received you from the Temple of the Lord. Now I am leaving you behind in my house, and I am going away to build houses; later I will return to you. The Lord will guard you.'

When Joseph returned some time later, he was petrified to find the sixteen-year-old Mary already six months pregnant:

> He struck his face and threw himself to the ground on the sackcloth and wept bitterly, saying, 'With what sort of countenance shall I look to the Lord God? What shall I pray concerning this maiden? For I received her a virgin from the Temple of the Lord, **and I did not guard her**.'

Word quickly spread, and a priest (or scribe) called Annas sent officers to arrest Joseph and Mary. Joseph was accused of having defiled a virgin of the temple, and Mary of having forgotten her Lord God. They were brought before a tribunal:

> Now Annas, the scribe, came to Joseph and said to him, 'Joseph, why have you not appeared in our assembly?' Joseph said to him, 'Because I was weary from my journey, and I rested the first day.' Annas turned and saw Mary pregnant; and he came running to the priest and said to him, 'Joseph, to whom you have borne witness, has acted very lawlessly.' The priest said, 'What is this?' Annas answered, 'The virgin whom Joseph received from the Temple he has defiled; he married her secretly and did not reveal it to the children of Israel.' The priest said to him, 'Joseph did these things?' Annas responded, '**Send attendants, and you will find the virgin pregnant**.' **The attendants went forth and found her as he said; and they brought her into the sanctuary, and she stood at the tribunal**.

They were both ordered to 'drink the water of the Lord's testing' and were sent into the desert, but both survived, and their innocence was thus proven. In *The Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (by some referred to as a poetic version[22] of *The Infancy Gospel of James*), it is recorded that 'all the multitude of Israel gathered together, so many that it was impossible to count them' to witness the trial, during which the visibly pregnant Mary steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, drank the 'water of testing,' and went around the altar seven times, proving her innocence.

Continuing with the narrative from *The Infancy Gospel of James*, Joseph took Mary to a cave where Christ was born with the assistance of a Hebrew midwife. Outside the cave the midwife encountered Salome, who confirmed that Mary still was a virgin, but the midwife was asked not to tell anyone about it. Christ was also visited by the Magi, who had come to Israel to look for a newborn king but having seen him did not inform Herod of his whereabouts. Herod (supposedly) reacted with vengeance.

> When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the Magi, in his wrath he sent his murderers, telling them to

kill all babies two years old and under. Mary, **hearing that they were killing the babies, was frightened, and she took the child and wrapped him and put him in a cow stable**. Now Elizabeth, hearing that Herod sought John, took him and went up into the mountain. She **looked around for a place where she might hide him, but there was no place**. Then Elizabeth groaned, saying in a loud voice, 'Mountain of God, receive a mother with her child'—for Elizabeth was unable to ascend. And immediately the mountain opened up and received her.

Other texts relate a similar story of Joseph and Mary. In *The Book of the Bee,* we read:

> And she was brought up with the virgins in the temple of the Lord, and performed the service of the temple with joyful heart and godly fervour until she was twelve years old. Because she was beautiful in appearance, the priests and the high priest took counsel and prayed before God that He would reveal to them what they should do with her. And the angel of God appeared unto the high priest and said to him, 'Gather together the staves of the men who have been left widowers by their first wives, and are well known for piety, uprightness, and righteousness, and what God sheweth thee, do.' And they brought many staves and laid them down in the temple; and they prayed before God that day and its night. The chief priest went into the temple and gave to each of them his staff, and when Joseph took his staff in his hand, there went forth from it a white dove, and hovered over the top of the rod, and sat upon it. The chief priest drew near to Joseph and kissed him on his head, and said to him, 'The blessed maiden has fallen to thy lot from the Lord; take her to thee until she arrives at the age for marriage, and (then) make a marriage feast after the manner and custom of men; for it is meet for thee (to do so) more than others, because ye are cousins.' Joseph said to the chief priest, 'I am an old and feeble man, and this is a girl, and unfit for my aged condition; it is better to give her to one of her own age, because I cannot rely upon myself to watch her **and guard her**.' The chief priest said to him, 'Take heed that thou dost not transgress the command of God, and bring a punishment upon thee.' So Joseph took Mary, and went to his dwelling-place.[23]

From these accounts a number of important observations can be made:

- The sixteen-year-old Mary, her parents, and Joseph were all public figures in Israel. Incidentally, the discrepancy between Joseph being selected to be the guardian of the twelve-year-old, ready-for-marriage Mary and her pregnancy at the age of sixteen is most likely due to Mariamne I having married Herod at the age of twelve and falling pregnant with Christ four years later, when she was guarded by Joseph, Herod's treasurer.
- If Mary had been given to Joseph as his wife, as originally suggested in the text, there would have been no objection to Mary having become pregnant. It is clear that the chastity of Mary had to be protected by Joseph—i.e., he had to guard her.
- Both were tried in public. The alleged trial by ordeal (the drinking of water mixed with dirt[24]) is nonsensical and must be seen as an attempt to hide the true nature of the verdict.
- Christ was born in a cave, i.e., in a secret place where he could not be found. Only the Magi knew where to find him. This cave may very well have been on an estate of Joseph, who was a very wealthy man. The birth in a cave would match the

biblical account of Herod dispatching search parties to locate the infant[25] for the purpose of killing him. That a large-scale slaughter of two-year-olds ever occurred is extremely unlikely, for Josephus, an arch critic of Herod, would certainly have mentioned the event but does not.[26]

- It is probably too much of a coincidence that John the Baptist was supposedly born at more or less the same time as Christ[27] (see section 5.1 for a discussion of the life of John the Baptist). The boy whom Elizabeth (John the Baptist's mother) concealed may in fact have been Christ himself. Nevertheless, it is clear that Herod had issued orders for the infant to be located, presumably to be executed. The story of the mountain splitting open is, of course, nonsense.
- Of all people, one would have expected Mary's mother Anna to have been present at the birth of the child, but, instead, it was only a 'Hebrew midwife' and a woman called Salome. Herod's sister was called Salome, and he had a daughter called Salome by his wife, Elpis.[28] Herod's sister Salome was involved in Mariamne's trial and instrumental in her 'execution,' so it is very likely that she assisted during the birth of Christ.

2.2 The History of Joseph the Carpenter

In *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*[29] it is related that Joseph was an educated and wise man **who had been made a priest in the temple of the Lord**, over and above practising his trade as a carpenter. It records that he had four male children, Judas, Justus, James, and Simon at that time, along with two daughters, Assia and Lydia. These children were presumably from his first wife, who must have been deceased at that time (Joseph is referred to as a widower in texts discussed above).

Mary, who had been raised in the temple, was entrusted to Joseph's care until she reached the age of marriage. In Joseph's house she met **James (the Less), whom she brought up and hence became known as the mother of James**. She had been under Joseph's supervision for two years when, **at the age of fourteen**, she became pregnant. Joseph

took her as his wife, she gave birth to Jesus in a cave in Bethlehem, and Joseph listed their names in accordance with the census commanded by Augustus. Satan informed Herod of Christ's birth, upon which the pious old man and his family fled to Egypt, accompanied by Salome. They returned to Israel after the death of Herod, **Joseph having reached the exceedingly old age of 111 years**. Joseph is consistently referred to as a righteous, pious old man, whose death was lamented by the inhabitants of Nazareth as well as of Galilee.

Although the story is an obvious embellishment of the traditional beliefs about Joseph, some points of potential interest stand out:

- Joseph was known as an educated and wise man, hardly the attributes of a common carpenter. In fact, the *Toledot Yeshu* states that Mary was betrothed to a rabbinical student rather than a carpenter,[30] which accords with the statement that Joseph was made a priest.
- Josephus recounts that a Joseph ben Ellemus served as high priest in the temple for one day.[31] Even though his appointment as high priest occurred long after the death of Mariamne, it is possible that he was remembered as the man who had been involved with Herod's young wife. In the Talmud he is called Joseph ben Ulam (Ailim) of Sepphoris.[32] Sepphoris was under Hasmonean (the family of Mariamne) rule until its capture by Herod the Great in 38 BCE.[33] It is therefore possible that if this man were indeed Mariamne's Joseph, then he may have been of Hasmonean descent. The name Ellemus/Ulam/Ailim is similar to Eli (Heli), the name of Joseph's father in Luke's genealogy of Christ. Serving as the high priest would have been a tremendous achievement for anyone, even if only for a day, and it could very well have been that this Joseph and Joseph the Carpenter were one and the same person.

It is instructive to take a close look at the meaning of 'ben Ulam.' The word *ben* means 'son'[34] and is typically used to denote 'the son

of,' followed by the name of the father of this son. Joseph ben Ulam would then be interpreted as Joseph, the son of Ulam.

In *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*,[35] we can find several Hebrew words that are phonetically similar to the word *ulam*. These words are listed in table 2.1, with Strong's word numbers also listed for easy reference.

Hebrew word	Strong's #	Meaning
'ûlam	197	a vestibule (as bound to the building), porch
'êlâm	361	a pillar-space, colonnade
'êylîm	362	plural of *'ayîl* (#352), anything strong, a ram, tree, despot
âlam	481	tongue-tied, put to silenc
'êlem	482	silence
'illêm	483	speechless
'ôlâm	5769	concealed, eternity, remotest time
'âlam	5956	conceal, hide
'âlam	5957	remote time (Aramaic)
'elem	5958	something kept out of sight, a lad or young man

Table 2.1. Hebrew words phonetically similar to Ulam

Without the original Hebrew text, it is difficult to decide which of these words to select, but even the original Hebrew text may not reflect what the name was actually supposed to mean. In the context of 'son (of),' one can rule out all the words relating to a building (#197, #361). Joseph as 'son of despots' or 'son of trees' (#362) can likewise be ruled out, along with the improbable meaning 'son of a lad' (#5958).

Three possibilities then remain, namely: 'son of eternity' (#5769, #5957), 'son of silence' (#481, #482, #483), and 'son of conceal(ment)' (#5769, #5956). None of these makes particular sense, but the last

possibility of the three may be stated differently as **(Joseph with) the hidden (concealed) son**, which would be an apt description of Christ's concealment from Herod and the public in general. In *The Infancy Gospel of James*, we read that 'Joseph was silent' following what must have been a tirade by the (high) priest, but it is unlikely that he would have been remembered by the nickname Son of Silence for that reason.

In section 3.2 it is argued that the Gnostic story of *Pistis Sophia*[36] is based on the story of Mary (Mariamne I) who had deserted her original faith and turned to the religion of the Magi (Zoroastrianism) instead. In the Gnostic accounts of Sophia (Mariamne I), an aeon called Nous, also known as the Father and Beginning of All Things, endeavoured to learn more about the gods but was restrained by 'Silence' from discussing his religious beliefs with the other aeons. The word *aeon*, incidentally, means 'an immeasurably long time,' like *olam* and *alam* in Hebrew, but in Gnosticism, it denotes an eternal power or spiritual being emanating from the Supreme Being.

It is shown in section 3.2 that Nous represents Joseph, and in this respect he may have been known as the 'silenced one,' or Joseph (ben) Elem (Ellemus), or perhaps Joseph, 'the silenced son,' if he had also belonged to the Hasmonean family. Nevertheless, the most likely interpretation seems to be **Joseph 'with (father of) the hidden son,'** i.e., father of Jesus Christ.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul confronts a 'Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named bar-Jesus,' who was also known as Elymas.[37] As discussed in chapter 5, Jesus Christ was known to outsiders as Simon Magus, the Egyptian false prophet. In order to distance Christ from this association, the early Christian writers described apostles like Simon Peter and Paul as **opponents** of this sorcerer. In the context of the preceding paragraphs, *bar-Jesus* would probably mean 'Jesus the Son' and *Elymas* (Ellemus) simply 'the hidden (one),' i.e., Jesus who was concealed from Herod.

According to Luke, the father of Joseph was a person known as Heli, but it is more likely that ben Heli was just another name of

Joseph, and that Joseph would then have been the son of Matthat (see table 1.1). Other points to consider include the following:

- Joseph was a widower with children, as contended in apocryphal texts like *The Infancy Gospel of James* (see section 4.2 for the calculation of the year of James's birth).
- He had reached an exceedingly old age. This fact will become important in the identification of a man called Joseph bar Sabbas, where *Sabbas* is shown to mean 'an old man' (see section 2.3).
- Joseph was a public figure as also claimed by other apocryphal texts. Joseph, Herod's treasurer, would have been one of the most public figures in Herod's court.

2.3 Josephus and Joseph of Arimathea, the Noble Decurio

The clearest identification of the profession and therefore identification of the father of Christ comes from Tertullian, who quoted the Jews as saying:

> The son of the carpenter or **the harlot**, the Sabbath-breaker, the Samaritan who had a devil. This is he whom you bought from Judas. This is he, who was struck with reed and fist, defiled with spittle, given gall and vinegar to drink. This is he whom the disciples secretly stole away, that it might be said he had risen, unless it was the gardener who removed him lest his lettuces should be trampled by the throng of visitors![38]

The translation of **harlot** as quoted above is translated **hireling** in the version authored by Schaff and Allan.[39] A closer look at this discrepancy reveals that the Latin text originally reads:

> Fabri[40] (of a workman, carpenter) aut[41] (or) quaestuariae[42] (quaesturae, of the office of a treasurer, or chamberlain) filius[43] (a son).

This passage therefore unequivocally states that the Jews knew that Christ was the son of (Joseph) the treasurer. It appears that the offices of a treasurer and chamberlain (an officer who managed the household of a monarch or noble) were interchangeably referred to as *quaesturae* in Roman times.

It is perhaps more than coincidence that in the New Testament we learn of a man called Chuza, who was the manager of Herod's household and was married to a woman called Joanna.[44] The word *chuza* appears to be derived from the Hebrew word *châzâh*,[45] meaning 'to gaze at, to behold, to select for oneself.' As Herod's powerful master of the house, he would have had access to every bedroom in Herod's household, and when the opportunity arose, he would have been in a position to select the most beautiful young women for himself. Therefore, it would seem that Chuza is just another name for Joseph, the father of Christ, and that he had been in charge of Herod's finances (his treasury) as well as his household.

Joseph, a widower who had supposedly married Mary, the mother of Christ (Mariamne I), appears to have married Mariamne II after her divorce from Herod. Shelomo, claimed to be the composer of a document called the *Josippon*, asserts that Josephus spoke of **Joseph having been married to a Marjam, the daughter of Hannah and the mother of Jesus, whom he married after her sister, also a Marjam, had died**.[46] Christian tradition holds that the parents of Mary, the mother of Jesus, were known as Joachim and Anna,[47] which most likely is the origin of the above link between Hannah and her two daughters called Marjam. Has there ever been a case where parents gave the same name to two of their children? It certainly is not correct, as Mary's mother's name was Alexandra, and the names Joachim and Anna must have been woven into the lineage of Christ to conceal Mary's true identity. The name Anna (Hannah) is perhaps a shortened version of the name Joanna (the wife of Chuza) and therefore the name of Joseph's deceased first wife. As she would have been an elderly lady from the generation of Joseph, she may mistakenly have been remembered as the mother of the two Marjams (Marys).

Alternatively, Shelomo's source or sources may have remembered the two Marjams being sisters—either because both had been married to Herod or because both had been associated with the elderly Joseph.

The Mary who had died would have been Mariamne I, who had been 'executed' by Herod. The pagan writer Celsus claims that he had heard from a Jew that **Mary had been divorced by her husband** (literally sent outdoors) after having had an affair with a Roman soldier called Pantheras, who was the real father of Jesus.[48] In the next section, it will be shown that it was Mariamne I who was linked to Pantheras and not Mariamne II. However, **it was Mariamne II who had been divorced by her husband Herod the Great**.[49] In other words, Celsus must have confused the two Mariamnes with each other, and like Shelomo, he also links Joseph (as the father of Jesus) to both Mariamnes, suggesting that Joseph had married Mariamne II following her divorce from Herod.

This brings us to a man known as Joseph of Arimathea (spelled Arimathaias in Greek), a 'secret disciple of Christ but also a rich and prominent member of the council and a good and upright man.'[50] This is the Joseph who asked Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, for Christ's body after the Crucifixion and placed it in his own, newly cut tomb in a garden at the place where Christ was crucified. In the apocryphal *The Gospel of Peter*, this garden is actually called the Garden of Joseph.[51] It will next be shown that this Joseph was the very same man as Joseph, the biological father of Jesus. If true, what better place would there be to be secretly taken care of than on your own father's premises?

Following Luke,[52] it is commonly assumed that Arimathea was a town of Judea, but no town of that name has been identified as yet.[53] Eisler speculates that he may indeed have been Josephus the historian (as Joseph bar Mattathia),[54] who claimed to be the son of a renowned man called Matthias:

> Now, my father Matthias was not only eminent on account of his nobility, but had a higher commendation on

> account of his righteousness, and was in great reputation in Jerusalem, the greatest city we have. I was myself brought up with Matthias, for he was my own brother, by both father and mother;[55]

The brother also called Matthias is discussed later in this section. A closer look at the construction of the name Arimathaias suggests that the name refers to a person and not a place. The Greek word *ara*[56] means 'a prayer' or 'a curse,' suggesting that the name simply means 'the Cursed Mathaias,' assuming that Matthias is just a variant spelling of Mathaias. Joseph of Arimathaias then becomes Joseph, the son of the cursed Mathaias. This Mathaias must have been a public figure in order for him to have earned such a nickname. As will become evident throughout this treatise, Mathaias had every reason to consider himself cursed: he was the father of Joseph, the man who seduced Mary into a new religion and became the father of Jesus Christ, the most hated man in the history of the Jews.

It will be argued in this treatise that Josephus was not the son of Matthias as he claimed but a son of Joseph, the father of Christ, by Mariamne II, the third wife of Herod the Great. With this in mind, we next take a look at the genealogy of Josephus, which contains three persons named Matthias (see table 2.2). In defence of apparently being accused of being of ignoble descent by his compatriot and enemy Justus of Tiberias, Josephus claims that he is of royal descent from his mother's side

> Further, by my mother I am of royal blood; for the children of the Asamoneus, from whom that family was derived, had both the office of the high priesthood, and the dignity of a king, for a long time together.[57]

and concocts a rather improbable genealogy for himself, as listed in table 2.2.

Person	Note	Year of birth
Simon Psellus	Lived at same time as Hyrcanus, son of Simon Tassi the high priest	Unknown (Simeon Tassi: 143–135 BCE,[58] John Hyrcanus 134–104 BCE[59])
Matthias Ephlias	Married daughter of Jonathan Apphus	Unknown (Jonathan Apphus died 143 BCE[60])
Matthias Curtus	Born in first year of reign of Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE)	134 BCE
Joseph	Born in ninth year of rule of Alexandra (76–67 BCE[61])	68–67 BCE (Matthias then 66 years old)
Matthias	Born in tenth year of reign of Archelaus (4 BCE–6 CE[62])	5–6 CE (Joseph then 73 years old)
Josephus	Born in first year of reign of Gaius Caesar (Caligula), 37–41 CE[63]	37 CE

Table 2.2. Genealogy of Josephus

A curious inconsistency in Josephus's lineage is that he refers to Simon Psellus as his great-grandfather, who, strictly speaking, should be Matthias Curtus. The list could be shortened if **the two Matthiases were one and the same person**, but even so, Simon Psellus would still be too far back in the lineage to be his grandfather's father.

The Latin word *curtus* means 'shortened' or 'mutilated,'[64] while the Hebrew word *'āphêlâh*,[65] which is phonetically similar to Ephlias, figuratively means 'misfortune.' Matthias Ephlias, therefore, appears to be the same person as Ara-Mathaias, or Mathaias (Matthias) the Cursed. The name Ephlias may also be related the word *'ephlâl*,[66] which is derived from the word *pâlal*,[67] meaning 'to judge' or 'to pray.'

Either way, the Hebrew words appear to be linked to the Greek *ara* (a curse or a prayer). It is later shown that the descendants of the Matthiases were all particularly small in stature, hence the nickname Curtus. The shortest of all would be Jesus Christ, the son of Joseph (see section 6.1). This Matthias most certainly is the same person as the Matthat of the biblical genealogies of Christ (see table 1.1).

The strange manner in which Josephus refers to his brother Matthias with whom he had been brought up (in this particular translation, he seems to be referring to his father as his brother also; why the lengthy explanation?), may suggest that it had been a fabrication that he introduced to distance himself from Jesus Christ, his half-brother. Although it is certainly possible that this was merely a peculiar way of mentioning an older brother called Matthias (the usual interpretation[68]), it is possible that this Matthias (the biblical Matthew?) was a much older son of Joseph, probably by his first wife, and that this significantly older brother acted as a father figure to the young Josephus. Josephus, who is called Jose or Joses in biblical literature,[69] may very well have been the brother of Christ. In Theodosius's *De Sancto Joseph at Arimathea*, it is claimed that Joseph (of Arimathea) and his son **Josephes** were baptised by Saint Philip,[70] confirming that Joseph had a son called 'Josephus.'

Perhaps the clearest indication that Josephus was lying about the identity of his father comes from a document **in which he is identified as Joseph ben Gorion and not Joseph ben Matthias. Who was 'Gorion?'** In what appears to be an early version of Josephus's *Wars*, called *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews: with the Destruction of the City of Jerusalem which History Begins where the Holy Scriptures End*, the author calls himself Joseph ben Gorion.[71] It should be noted that Joseph ben Gorion is generally believed to have been an Italian Jew who lived in the ninth century or later and falsely professed to be the original Josephus, and he has become known amongst scholars as Joseppon, Josippon, and Pseudo-Josephus.[72] His history of the wars of the Jews is accordingly referred

to as the *Josippon*.[73] Whatever be the case, it will be shown that this concise work of his, which deals with the wars of the Jews, contains an account of, specifically, the siege of Jerusalem that seems to agree closely with and contains details not mentioned in Josephus's *Wars*. This suggests that the author, translator, or copier of the document made use of an earlier copy of Josephus's *Wars*. That would also explain why the author is listed as Joseph ben Gorion, which is argued here to be a valid nickname for Josephus.

The word *Gorion* (gurion) may be linked to the Hebrew words *guwr* (pronounced 'goor'),[74] which refers to a cub or a whelp, specifically of a lion, and *'own*,[75] which means 'ability, power, wealth' or 'might.' The name 'ben Gorion' would then mean 'Son of a Mighty Lion Cub,' which does not make any particular sense. Alternatively, it could be related to the identical word *guwr*,[76] meaning 'to turn aside from the road' or 'to sojourn in a land as a client,' but 'son of' in this context makes even less sense. The word is sometimes used to denote 'a stranger' or 'sojourners,' which would render 'Son of a Mighty Stranger,' but this would be an unusual way of identifying a son in Hebrew society.

However, 'gorion' may also be a derivation of the Greek word *geron*,[77] meaning 'an old man,' and Joseph ben Gorion would then mean 'Joseph, son of the Old Man.' This description would match the earlier reference to Joseph the Carpenter having reached an age of 111 years. It would appear that Josephus hardly knew his aged father and initially was proud of being the son of this famous old man, as is evident from the rather honest but less detailed original work. Only when others like Justus of Tiberias were quick to point out just who Joseph and Josephus's mother were did he concoct an alternative genealogy for himself.

He furthermore mentions a Joseph, the son of Gorion, as one of the generals appointed during the Jewish War, just as he himself was appointed as general over both Galilees.[78] As it would have been well known that a Joseph ben Gorion had been appointed as general

during the war, the only way in which Josephus could distance himself from that person would be to mention Joseph the son of Gorion as a second person in his version of the war. Maier, in his comment on this Joseph ben Gorion, the impersonator of Josephus, states that 'the cheat is too gross to be put upon the learned world,' without ever considering, it seems, that there may be an entirely different reason for the 'cheat.'

According to the Acts of the Apostles, a replacement had to be found for Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ, and this was done by casting the lot between a **Joseph (surnamed Justus) Barsabbas** and a Matthias,[79] the lot falling on Matthias. We also read of a Joseph Barnabas, a Cyprian coworker of Paul with whom he later had an argument, causing the two to part ways.[80] In both incidents there is a Joseph who is rejected in one way or another, possibly suggesting that they may have been one and the same person.

This is a long shot, but could this person be a young Josephus, who accompanied Christ (Paul) some years after his resurrection? The patronymic 'bar Sabbas' is often interpreted to mean 'son of the Sabbath,'[81] from the Hebrew *shabbath*,[82] meaning 'the Sabbath.' However, it is also widely recognised that the word *sabbas* may be derived from the Hebrew word *sêybâh*,[83] meaning 'old age' or 'grey-headed,' and can therefore be interpreted as 'the old man.'[84,85] Although both Josephus and his father were Jewish, it would seem that his father was generally known by the affectionate Greek words *Sabbas* and *Geron* (Gorion), 'the Old Man.'

It was not uncommon for Jews to have two names—a Jewish one and a Gentile one.[86] That he may have been remembered by a Greek nickname is not surprising, as Christ's father was remembered by the Jews as Pandira (Panthera), both versions being of Latin origin. The description *bar Sabbas*, therefore, seems to mean 'son of the Old Man,' but there appear to be no Hebrew or Greek words phonetically identical to *Nabas*. The Hebrew word *nabat*[87] means 'to regard with pleasure' or 'to behold.' The Hebrew letters for *t* and *s* could easily have been

mistaken for the other, so that Barnabas may very well have meant 'son of the beholder' or 'son of a man with an eye for beauty.' That man would have been Chuza, the manager of Herod's household, Chuza being a nickname for Joseph, who was also Herod's treasurer.

Regardless of the identity of Joseph Barnabas, in *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* (see section 2.2), **one of the four brothers of Christ is called Justus, while he is called Joseph in the New Testament** (see section 3.4). How many men would have been known by both names—Joseph and Justus? Probably only one, **which would confirm that Joseph Justus was a brother of Christ, being a son of Joseph, Christ's father** (Sabbas, the Old Man). The Matthias who was selected as replacement for Judas Iscariot may very well have been a son of Simon Boethus (see section 7.1). One of the other companions of Paul was called Judas Barsabbas,[88] and his surname would suggest that he, too, was a son of 'the Old Man.' We also know that Christ had a brother called Judas, a further suggestion that Judas Barsabbas and Joseph Barsabbas were both brothers of Christ.

Returning to Joseph ben Gorion, the name therefore matches the description of Joseph Barsabbas (son of the Old Man). That Josephus had been involved with Christ is indirectly alluded to by Josephus himself:

> And now that I am come to this part of my narration, I have a mind to say a few things to Justus, who has himself written a history concerning these affairs, as also to others who profess to write history, but have little regard to truth, and are not afraid, either out of ill-will or goodwill to some persons, to relate falsehoods. These men do like those who compose forged deeds and conveyances; and because they are not brought to the like punishment with them, they have no regard to truth. When, therefore, Justus undertook to write about these facts, and about the Jewish war, that he might appear to have been an industrious man, **he falsified in what he related about me**, and could not speak truth even about his own country. Because of that, being lied about by him, I am under a necessity to make my defense; and so I shall say what I have concealed until now. And let no one wonder that I have not told the world these things a great while ago. For although it be necessary for an historian to write the truth, yet is such a one not bound severely to comment on the wickedness of certain men—not out of any favor to them, but out of an author's own moderation. How then does it come to pass, O Justus, you most wise of writers (that I may address myself to him as if he were here present,) for so you boasted of yourself, **that I and the Galileans have been the authors of that sedition which your country engaged in, both against the Romans and against the king**?[89]

The instigator of the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans was none other than Jesus Christ, and from the accounts concerning Joseph Barsabbas and Joseph Barnabas, it would appear that the young Josephus quickly realised what the Man from Galilee[90] (Christ) was up to and turned his back on him. He would afterwards, of course, have denied any involvement in the Galilean's revolution. Worse still, if Mariamne II had indeed been his mother, there could not have been a greater insult than that he was the son of the woman who had become known as the Whore of Judea, Christ's lover (see section 6.3). No wonder then that he was so quick to refute '**those who slander me [as of lower origin]!**'[91]

As related earlier, Josephus claimed that he was of royal descent from his mother's side. The bloodline from his mother's side came through the daughter of Jonathan Maccabeus, who ruled ca. 161–143 BCE.[92] However, it is possible that Josephus introduced this link to royalty merely to deflect allegations that his mother was Mariamne

II, who was often associated with or confused with Mariamne I, a Hasmonean queen.

When Christ's body was removed from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea was assisted by yet another secretive disciple of Christ, Nicodemus.[93] He is widely believed to be the person known as **Nakdimon (Boni) ben Gorion (Gurion)** in the Talmud,[94,95] which implies that Nicodemus, too, was a son of Joseph, the Old Man, hence his participation in the 'resurrection' of Christ. This would confirm that Joseph, the son of the cursed Matthias, and Joseph, who was called Gorion, were one and the same person. Nakdimon ben Gorion was one of the three richest men in Jerusalem, each of whom was capable of supplying the city with food for ten years.

Legends of the British Isles relate that Joseph of Arimathea and a group of his companions arrived in Britain around 63 CE.[96] However, in *The History of that Holy Disciple Joseph of Arimathea*,[97] it is claimed that on Joseph's tombstone in Glastonbury, Britain, it was recorded: '**He died 45 AD, aged 86**.'

This date has particular significance. According to Josephus, his (grand)father Joseph was born in the year 67 BCE, and if he really died in the year 45 CE, he would have been around **67 (BCE) + 45 (CE) = 112 years old** at that time, identical to the claim made in *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*, that Joseph died at the age of **111 years**. There are no doubt many who will reject any notion of Joseph of Arimathea ever having visited Britain, but why, then, do these otherwise absurd legends exist at all, and how did they originate?[98]

The different ages associated with Joseph, the father of Christ (111 years), and with Joseph of Arimathea (86 years) could have a simple explanation. It is certain that once rumours started going around that Christ had risen from the grave, the Roman and Jewish authorities would have wanted to question one man only—Joseph of Arimathea, who undertook to bury Christ after his crucifixion. Some legends of that period claim that Joseph of Arimathea had been arrested and locked up but managed to escape, and that many years later he

was sent by Philip to Britain, along with Mary Magdalene, Martha, and Lazarus.[99] However, the four great church councils of Pisa, Constance, Sienna, and Basle all agreed that Joseph of Arimathea arrived in Britain 'immediately after the passion of Christ.'[100] If Joseph of Arimathea and Joseph, the father of Christ, were indeed one and the same person as postulated in this treatise, and Joseph was born in 67 BCE, his age at the Crucifixion of Christ (in 21 CE, see section 4.2) would have been **67 (BCE) + 21 (CE) = 86 years**. In other words, Joseph of Arimathea disappeared from Israel when he was eighty-six years old, and his disappearance would probably have been interpreted as his death at the hands of the authorities. However, those who went with him would have known that Joseph, the father of Christ, died when he was 111 years old.

As Christ's (supposed) great-uncle, Joseph (of Arimathea) became Christ's guardian when Mary's husband Joseph died early in Christ's life, and he took Christ with him on his journeys to Glastonbury, England.[101] This statement confirms that Joseph of Arimathea was involved with Christ as a boy or baby, again linking Joseph of Arimathea to Joseph, the father of Christ. However, it may merely confirm that Christ was taken to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea after Christ's crucifixion. According to most British traditions, Joseph of Arimathea arrived in Britain along with eleven companions, including Mary Magdalene, Martha, and Lazarus.

However, later traditions relate that the Virgin Mary had also come to Britain and was also buried at Glastonbury.[102] Joseph would never have left the woman he had gotten into so much trouble to fend for herself. As already stated, Joseph more than likely married Mariamne II (who later became Christ's Mary Magdalene) after her divorce from Herod, and she would have accompanied him to the British Isles. Christ and his mother must have accompanied them as well, and he would have stayed there until he had fully recovered from his ordeal, possibly for many years. From various apocryphal texts, it would seem that Mary Magdalene (and initially also her son

Josephus) returned to Israel with Christ and accompanied him on his mission to rid the world of its gods and free the Jews from Roman oppression. Joseph and his Mariamne (I) never returned to Israel and would have spent their final years together in Britain.

Epiphanius records that Joseph begot James when he was about forty years old.[103] If Christ was born in 28 BCE as argued above, Joseph would have been thirty-nine years old at that time, indeed, 'about forty years old.' It is possible that Joseph had lost his first wife during the birth of James and so became a widower with an infant son. In *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*, it was recorded that Mary 'met' James in Joseph's house and brought him up. If she had fallen pregnant by Joseph within the first month or two that he had to guard her on Herod's orders, she would probably have given birth to Christ at the same time that she was taking care of James. It should be noted that James is listed amongst the four brothers of Christ (see section 3.4), and as a son of Alphaeus, James must have been a son of Joseph by his first wife.

Regarding Josephus's age, he claims to have been born in the first year of the reign of Caius Caesar (Caligula), the year 37 CE (see table 2.2). If Christ had been crucified in 21 CE, the references to the brothers of Christ before his crucifixion would imply that Josephus (Jose, Joses, or Josephes) would have had to be born before that time. It is, however, likely that when the authors of the gospels much later wrote their versions of the story of Christ, they included Joseph, the youngest of his half-brothers, as if he had been present when Christ preached in Israel prior to his crucifixion.

Josephus must nevertheless have been born significantly earlier than he claimed. He is believed to have died sometime around 100 CE,[104] which would have made him a mere sixty-three years old at the time of his death. Given the longevity of the members of his family, particularly Joseph, one would expect him to have lived significantly longer. The Matthias Josephus referred to as his father (i.e., his father figure, with Joseph being a frail old man) was born in 6 CE

(see table 2.2) and, according to Josephus, survived up to the siege of Jerusalem.[105] Josephus was most likely born to Joseph and Mariamne II sometime after her divorce from Herod and probably at least a decade before Christ's crucifixion, ca. 21 CE.

Jerome (ca. 347–420 CE) describes Joseph of Arimathea as 'the noble decurio.'[106] The Latin word ***decurio*** means 'head of a body of ten,' either as a military company commander, as a senator of a municipium, or as a **head-chamberlain**.[107] It has already been pointed out that Chuza, Herod's chamberlain, must have been the same man as Joseph, the father of Christ. The virtually identical word ***decuria*** can also be translated as '**a set of ten men appointed to any business or office,**'[108] which would confirm that Joseph, as the head ('the noble') of this group, was associated with the office of the treasury, Herod's 'business office.' Joseph of Arimathea was therefore known to have been involved in Herod's financial affairs (as his treasurer or chamberlain), as was Joseph the Carpenter, the father of Christ.

In *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, also called *The Acts of Pilate*, Joseph of Arimathea is called 'honoured father Joseph.'[109] Mark refers to Joseph of Arimathea as an honourable, respected, or prominent council member,[110] while Luke calls him a council member who was 'a good and upright man.'[111] The appellations all agree that Joseph, the father of Christ, had been a public figure and a righteous, pious old man as discussed in section 2.2. Legends from the British Isles[112] record that Joseph of Arimathea was a tin merchant, and that he was also called 'Joseph de Marmore.' The word *de* is Latin and means 'of, concerning, about,'[113] so one would expect the description 'Marmore' also to be of Latin origin. The Latin noun phrase *marmor marmoris* refers to 'a marble stone,' while the adjective *marmoreus marmorea* means 'made of marble.'[114] Herod lavishly used marble for his castles and prominent buildings,[115] and it seems that Joseph was in charge of these operations as well. In the British legends, it is further recorded that:

> There came with Bran the Blessed from Rome to Britain—Arwystli Hen [Aristobulus the Aged], Ilid, Cyndaf, man of Israel, Maw or Mawan, son of Cyndaf.[116]

Cyndaf apparently means 'chief' or 'head,' and:

> Ilid is believed to be the British name for Joseph of Arimathea, and Mawan is considered to be the latter's son Josephes.

If these odd names can indeed be linked to Joseph of Arimathea and his son, the above passage contains a crucial link between Joseph of Arimathea and Joseph, the father of Jesus. The names may be of ancient British origin but could very well be transliterations of the Hebrew names of the persons in question. The name Cyndaf could then be a contracted form of the Hebrew words s^{e}*neh*,[117] meaning 'to prick,' and *dâphaq*,[118] meaning 'to knock, press severely, or beat.' The name Ilid appears to have a similar meaning, being linked to the Latin (Roman) word *illido*,[119] which means 'to beat against or thrust into.' This would be an apt description of a mining prospector, who would in such a manner make assessments of the mining potential of rock formations. Therefore, Cyndaf could simply be the Hebrew equivalent of the Roman nickname Ilid. Joseph, Herod's treasurer, may very well have made a name for himself as a young man in charge of the Roman mining activities in Britain. Furthermore, the name *Mawan* appears to be derived from the Hebrew word *mâ'ên*,[120] (pronounced *maw-ane*), meaning 'to refuse.'

In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told that the choice of a successor to Judas Iscariot was made by means of the casting of lots and that Matthias was thus selected, not Joseph (Justus) Barsabbas. Such a lot-casting process may have been followed, but it is also possible that this Joseph had at some stage refused to take up a role amongst the other followers of Christ. As discussed earlier in this section, the

person known as Joseph Barnabas may have been the same person as Joseph Barsabbas, and it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles that Joseph Barsabbas had quarrelled with Paul and had turned his back on him. This identification equates Sabbas (Joseph, the Old Man) with Joseph of Arimathea. Of equal importance is that in these legends, the son of Joseph of Arimathea is called Josephes, which suggests the brother of Christ, called Jose or Joses, was in fact called by that name. The name Josephes is virtually identical to the name of the famous contemporary of the apostles, the historian Josephus.

Finally, it is recorded in *The Gospel of Nicodemus* that Joseph of Arimathea had been arrested and locked away in prison following the resurrection of Christ but somehow had managed to escape.[121] He was later traced to Arimathea, where 'no one dared to lay hands on him.' Although it is possible that Joseph had been arrested after the disappearance of Christ's body, a more likely origin of this narrative is that his arrest refers to the arrest and trial of Joseph and Mary as described in section 2.1. The reason why he could not be touched was that he was most likely the son-in-law of a high-ranking Roman official called Gaius (Caius) Vibius Pansa Caetronianus (see section 2.4), and he had therefore become a Roman citizen.

There can be no doubt that everyone knew who the father of Mary's child was, and given Herod's ferocious revenge on anyone whom he had only suspected of behaving inappropriately with Mariamne, many would have considered Joseph's escape from execution by Herod a miracle. Herod, however, dared not touch Joseph, as he was the son-in-law of a Roman official and a highly regarded individual in Roman circles. Josephus, as Joseph ben Gorion, records in the early copy of his works, *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews*, that:

> Gorion, the Priest, father of Joseph the Priest, who wrote this book to the Israelites, was at that time in bonds and prison, in a certain Turret, a man of great age, being

> hundred and thirty, and no man could come unto him, nor from him; Joseph therefore went to the Turret where his father was kept, to understand how he did. He beheld also the Turret afar off, if he might espy his father, and comfort him. And as he passed by looking up to the Turret, the Seditious hurled a stone at him, which hit him on the head, that it overthrew him. The Seditious seeing Joseph cast out of his chariot, determined to go down onto him; but when Titus had knowledge thereof, he sent a great strength to help him up again, and defend him, that his enemies did him no harm.[122]

Here, Josephus admits that his father was a man called Joseph who had been a priest, and in *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* (see section 2.2), it is claimed that Joseph, the father of Christ, had been a priest. From Joseph(us)'s own description, it is clear that nobody had access to his father, and by implication, nobody could tell whether he was even still alive. He makes his father an exceedingly old man, matching the description of Joseph the Carpenter as 'Sabbas.' The siege of Jerusalem by Titus began in 70 CE,[123] by which time Joseph (born 67 CE), if still alive, would have been approximately 137 years old. This is close to Joseph ben Gorion's 130 years and strongly suggests that rumours must have abounded amongst the Jews that Joseph had been kept in solitary confinement in the turret since his trial, and that he was still alive at that time. In fact, it is claimed in *The Life of James the Less* that when Titus entered Jerusalem, he freed Joseph of Arimathea from a hole in a thick wall wherein the Jews had shut him up following the Crucifixion of Christ.[124] **This claim, therefore, suggests that Joseph of Arimathea and Gorion the Priest were one and the same person**.

The Romans would have ensured that Joseph, as Herod's treasurer and son-in-law of Caius Pansa, was released sometime after his trial. During the siege of Jerusalem, Josephus's enemies might have spread the rumour that Josephus's father was still alive and was

being kept in the tower simply as a ruse to lure Josephus into a trap, which evidently nearly worked. It should be noted that in his *Wars*, Josephus also records that his father had been imprisoned:

> They also kept Josephus's father in prison, and made public proclamation, that no citizen whosoever should either speak to him himself, or go into his company among others, for fear he should betray them.[125]

The imprisonment and isolation of Josephus's father in both Josephus's *Wars* and Joseph ben Gorion's *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews* lends authenticity to the latter document and suggests that it must have been an earlier version compiled by Josephus. The fact that Joseph of Arimathea was imprisoned and that 'no one dared to lay hands on him'—as discussed earlier—may also be related to the story of the imprisonment and isolation of Josephus's father. It would seem that rumours that Josephus's father (Joseph of Arimathea) was still alive did eventually surface, but as no one knew what had become of him, it was assumed that he was still kept in prison somewhere by the authorities.

2.4 The Talmudic Accounts

In 1554 CE a papal bull ordered the removal of all references from the Talmud and other Jewish texts deemed offensive and blasphemous to Christians.[126] There are nevertheless some passages in these texts that are generally accepted to refer to Christ, most significantly:

> It was taught. R. Eliezer said to the Sages: But did not **Ben Stada** bring forth witchcraft from Egypt by means of scratches upon his flesh? He was a fool, answered they, and proof cannot be adduced from fools…Which proves that scratches are important, and so one should be liable therefore[127]

and as commented in this translation, this passage follows in the uncensored text:

> Was he then **the son of Stada**: surely he was the son of **Pandira**?-Said R. Hisda: The husband was Stada, the paramour was **Pandira**. But the husband was **Pappos b. Judah**? His **mother** was **Stada**. But his mother was **Miriam the hairdresser**? It is as we say in Pumbeditha: This one has been unfaithful to (lit., turned away from - satath da) her husband.

The only other Pappos (Papus) ben Judah that is named in Jewish literature is a person who was a contemporary of the Rabbi Akiva (died 134 CE[128]) and who reportedly used to lock his wife indoors when he went out.[129]

The word *pappos* is of Greek origin and means 'grandfather,'[130] while the Latin word *pappus* means 'grandfather' or simply 'an old man.'[131] Herod the Great became terminally ill at the age of 70[132] and would certainly have qualified as an old man. He may also have become impotent, as his genitals 'were rotting and produced worms,' according to Josephus.[133] Furthermore, the reference to Pappos ben Judah having locked up his wife whenever he left most certainly refers to Herod the Great, who effectively had Mariamne locked up during his absence. It would seem that the facts of who was who were not clear to the authors of the particular texts involved, hence the confusion.

Much has been speculated about the identity of the person called Pandira (see, for example, *Christianity in the Talmud and Midrash* by Herford[134]). In certain manuscripts of the *Josippon*, Christ is actually referred to as Ben Joseph ben Pandera,[135] suggesting that Pandera was not the father but the grandfather of Christ (*ben* means 'son of' in Hebrew). Pandera is sometimes also referred to as Panthera or Pantera, but these forms of the name are not found in any manuscripts of the Talmud, only Pandera (Pandira).[136]

The key to the identity of Pandera is to be found through the name of a person called Joseph Barsabbas, also known as Justus, who was one of the contenders to be the replacement of Judas. In *The Acts of Paul,* Barsabas Justus is curiously called '**Barsabas Justus of the Flat Feet**.'[137] Incidentally, in this document it is recorded that Joseph Barsabbas confessed to be a follower of Christ and was thrown into prison to be executed, but this is clearly a fabrication by the author of the document. Unless the description 'flat feet' referred to a physical aspect of Joseph Barsabbas, which is unlikely, it must have had a different meaning.

The renowned Roman orator Cicero had once defended a **Roman soldier** called Quintus **Ligarius** before Julius Caesar in his famous *Pro Ligario* speech.[138] Ligarius, who went to Africa as a lieutenant in the Roman army and was later appointed as governor of the province of Africa, was accused of having fought against Caesar in Africa. However, he was pardoned by Caesar after hearing Cicero's plea on his behalf. In his speech Cicero mentions a Caius **Pansa** (Gaius Vibius Pansa Caetronianus), who had been involved in the charges against Ligarius to a lesser extent. Caius Pansa was consul of the Roman Republic and was therefore a public figure that would have been known amongst the Romans as well as Rome's vassal states. In Latin the word ***pansa*** means 'splay-footed' or '**having broad (flat) feet.**'[139] Pansa died in 43 BCE, which makes him a contemporary of a young Joseph, the treasurer of Herod.

Had Joseph indeed been born around 67 BCE (see table 2.2), it could easily have happened that he had gotten to know some Roman officials very well through the nature of his office, and that Pansa, in his early years, may have visited Herod's palace regularly. If Pansa had in fact been the person who had instated Joseph as Herod's treasurer, then Joseph Sabbas (the Old Man) may very well have been known as Pansa's Joseph ('Joseph of the Flat Feet'). He may even have given Joseph one of his daughters as a wife. This is suggested by the fact that Paul would claim to be a Roman citizen,[140] which could

probably only have been true if Joseph had been granted Roman citizenship. His mother, Mariamne I, would certainly not have been granted Roman citizenship. One can imagine what public interest it would have created if Joseph had indeed married the daughter of a Roman consul, which must certainly be the reason why the name was remembered in Jewish history. There can be no doubt that everybody in Jewish upper social circles knew Joseph the Treasurer very well and by implication also that the man whom turned Israel upside down, Jesus Christ, was related to this Joseph in some way or another.

That such a link is probably true is suggested by two other aspects of the Joseph-the-father-of-Jesus traditions. The first is that Joseph was assumed to have been a carpenter. The Latin word for a carpenter is ***lignarius***,[141] which under the circumstances seems to be too much of a coincidence, given its similarity to the name Ligarius. Had Ligarius regularly accompanied Pansa and thus became associated with him or had he become associated with Pansa during his treason hearing, it is very likely that a person called Ligarius was not known to the later followers of Christ, and that his name was therefore interpreted as 'carpenter.' The pagan writer Celsus claims that he had heard from a Jew that **Mary had been divorced by her husband** (literally 'sent outdoors') after having had an affair with a **Roman soldier** called **Pantheras**, who was the real father of Jesus:

> He [Celsus] accuses Him of having 'invented his birth from a virgin,' and upbraids Him with being 'born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, **who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery**; **that after being driven away by her husband**, and wandering about for a time, **she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child**, who **having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt** on account of his poverty, and having

> there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.'…
>
> …when she was pregnant, she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that **she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera**;[142]

Mariamne I could easily have been confused with Mariamne II, the third wife of Herod, whom he later divorced. Mary most certainly did not make a living by spinning. This statement by Celsus is undoubtedly based on one of the duties the young Mary had to perform in the temple, as recorded in *The Infancy Gospel of James*:

> There took place a council of the priests, saying, '**Let us make a veil for the Temple of the Lord**.' The priest said, 'Call the undefiled virgins from the tribe of David.' The attendants went out and sought them, and they found seven. Then the priest remembered the child Mary, that she was of the tribe of David and was pure before God; and the attendants went forth and brought her. They brought them into the Temple of the Lord, and the priest said, 'Assign by lot for me here **someone who will spin the gold thread and the white and the linen and the silk and the hyacinth-blue and the scarlet and the genuine purple**.' The genuine purple and the scarlet were assigned by lot to Mary, and taking them she went into her house.…**Mary, taking the scarlet, spun it**.…She worked the purple and the scarlet and brought them to the priest; and the priest blessed her.[143]

The temple was constructed by Herod the Great, and although it was only completed under the procuratorship of Albinus[144] (62–64 CE),[145]

the inner part of the temple would probably have been completed first. The veil that Mary had woven a part of would most likely have been the famous curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place,[146] which was supposedly torn in two when Christ died on the cross (see section 6.2). This ties Mary directly to Herod and to the early phase of the construction of the temple.

The name **Pansa** is derived from the Latin verb *pando* ***pandere*** *pandi* ***pansum***,[147] which means 'to stretch out, extend' or 'to spread out.' There can be little doubt that the name **Pandera** is simply a variant of ***pandere***, or ***pansa***. The name **Barsabas Justus of the Flat Feet** should therefore be translated **Justus, son of (Joseph) the Old Man, (son) of Pansa**. That Pansa was indeed the father or actually the father-in-law of Joseph, is corroborated in some uncensored manuscripts of the *Josippon*, in which, as related earlier, Josephus is quoted as having referred to Jesus as **Ben Joseph ben Pandera**. Epiphanius records that Joseph, the father of Christ, was 'the brother of Cleopas but the son of Jacob surnamed **Panther**.'[148] This suggests that he, or at least his source(s), knew that the **father** of Joseph was known by that name, but from a circumstantial perspective, it is more likely that Pansa was the **father-in-law** of Joseph.

As cited above, it is recorded in the Talmud that Ben Stada brought magic from Egypt in the form of incisions in his flesh. The corruption of this name to **Panthera**, meaning 'leopard' in Latin, may have been a pun on Christ himself, who seems to have had incisions in his skin (tattoos) that may have resembled the patterns on a leopard's skin. Christ would then have been mockingly referred to as 'the son of a leopard.'

Regarding Christ's mother, the Talmud cautiously relates the following:

> Simeon ben Azzai has said: I found in Jerusalem a book of genealogies; therein was written: That so-and-so is a bastard son of a married woman,[149, 150]

which, if indeed referring to Christ, confirms that he was the illegitimate son of a married woman. Likewise, another covert reference to Christ reads:

> What of **a certain person** as regards the world to come?… What of a Mamzer [bastard], as to inheriting? What of his performing the levirate duty? What of his founding his house? What of his founding his sepulchre?[151, 152]

A discussion on bastardy in the *Toledot*, regarded by some as relating to Mary, reads:

> Then said he to her, 'Of what sort is this thy son?' She said to him, 'When I betook myself to the bridal chamber I was in my separation, and my husband stayed away from me. But my paranymph [Mead: her bridegroom's best man] came to me, and by him I have this son.' So the boy was discovered to be a bastard and the son of a woman in her separation.[153]

Should this text be based on the circumstances of Christ's birth, the mention of the father of the illegitimate child as the best man of her husband matches Joseph, the treasurer of Herod, who must have been a close friend of Herod's to be entrusted with the king's money. The fact that her husband was away during her separation (Niddah—menstrual cycle[154]) appears to be no more than a rationalization as to why he had been absent in the first place. Herod was indeed absent from Mary (Miriam = Mariam-ne) when she became pregnant, having been summoned away by Antony. The full story in the *Toledot* reads:

> In the year 3671 in the days of King Jannaeus, **a great misfortune befell Israel**, when there arose a certain

disreputable man of the tribe of Judah, whose name was **Joseph Pandera**. He lived at Bethlehem, in Judah. **Near his house dwelt a widow and her lovely and chaste daughter named Miriam**. Miriam was betrothed to **Yohanan**, of the royal house of David, a man learned in the Torah and God-fearing. At the close of a certain Sabbath, **Joseph Pandera, attractive and like a warrior in appearance, having gazed lustfully upon Miriam, knocked upon the door of her room and betrayed her by pretending that he was her betrothed husband, Yohanan**. Even so, she was amazed at this improper conduct and submitted only against her will.

Thereafter, when Yohanan came to her, Miriam expressed astonishment at behavior so foreign to his character. It was thus that they both came to know the crime of Joseph Pandera and the terrible mistake on the part of Miriam. Whereupon Yohanan went to Rabban Shimeon ben Shetah and related to him the tragic seduction. Lacking witnesses required for the punishment of Joseph Pandera, and Miriam being with child, Yohanan **left for Babylonia**.…After King Jannaeus, his wife Helene ruled over all Israel.[155]

The year 3671, which is the number of years since the Creation (Anno Mundi, 3760 BC),[156] translates to about 90 BCE, when Alexander Jannaeus was king of Judaea (103–76 BCE).[157] From this account of the birth of Christ, the following observations can be made.

- The reference to King Jannaeus links Mary (Miriam) directly to the Hasmonean kingdom, and the reference to Yohanan (John) of the royal house of David means that she was betrothed to a royal husband. Yohanan is most likely a misplaced recollection

of John Hyrcanus II,[158] the son of Jannaeus. John Hyrcanus was the grandfather of Mariamne, wife of Herod the Great, and was executed by Herod in 30 BCE, the year before Mariamne's 'execution.'

- King Jannaeus had long been dead by the time Joseph was instructed to guard Mariamne, so one must assess why Jannaeus was brought into the story of Joseph and Mary. That the Jews in general had lost the exact accounts of their earlier history is attested to by a statement in the Talmud (Jannaeus had been long deceased when Martha supposedly tried to bribe him):

> For R. Assi said: A tarkabful of denars did Martha, the daughter of Boethus give to King Jannai to nominate Joshua ben Gamala as one of the high priests.[159]

Simon Boethus and his family, including Martha, had become involved with Christ upon his return to Israel (see section 7.1), and in a note to the above text from the Talmud, it is explained that:

> Jannai is often employed in the Talmud as a general patronymic for Hasmonean and Herodian rulers. Here it stands for Agrippa II, v. Josephus Ant. XX, 9, 4.…

For some reason one of the kings who ruled during the time of the Boethus family was called Jannaeus, as attested to by another link in the Talmud to a King Jannaeus in the time of Christ:

> What of R. Joshua b. Perahjah? **When King Jannai slew our Rabbis, R. Joshua b. Perahjah (and Jesus) fled to Alexandria of Egypt**. On the resumption of peace, Simeon b. Shetach sent to him: 'From me, [Jerusalem] the holy city, to thee, Alexandria of Egypt

> [my sister]. My husband dwelleth within thee and I am desolate.' He arose, went, and found himself in a certain inn, where great honour was shewn him. 'How beautiful is this Acsania!' [The word denotes both inn and innkeeper. R. Joshua used it in the first sense; the answer assumes the second to be meant.] Thereupon [Jesus] observed, 'Rabbi, her eyes are narrow.' 'Wretch,' he rebuked him, 'dost thou thus engage thyself.' He sounded four hundred trumpets and excommunicated him. **He [Jesus] came before him many times pleading, 'Receive me!'** But he would pay no heed to him. One day he [R. Joshua] was reciting the Shema, when Jesus came before him. He intended to receive him and made a sign to him. He [Jesus] thinking that it was to repel him, went, put up a brick, and worshipped it. 'Repent,' said he [R. Joshua] to him. He replied, 'I have thus learned from thee: He who sins and causes others to sin is not afforded the means of repentance.' And a Master has said, '**Jesus the Nazarene practised magic and led Israel astray**.'[160, 161]

- Alexandra, the mother of Mariamne I, was indeed a widow, and Mariamne was known for her beauty. Mariamne's chastity was guarded by Herod at risk of death to anyone who would dare come close to her in an inappropriate manner, and throughout Israel people probably joked that if ever there was a chaste woman, that woman would be Mariamne.
- Joseph Pandera, Herod's treasurer and housekeeper, had access to her bedroom and had a sexual liaison with Mary while her husband [Herod] was away. Joseph had to guard Mariamne during Herod's absence and would have had access to her quarters.
- Herod learned of her infidelity upon his return from his meeting with Antony.

- He later left for Babylonia (according to the *Toledot*, some traditions say Egypt). In the time of Josephus, a part of Egypt (Letopolis, at least) was still known as Babylon.[162] This description seems to be a muddled recollection of Herod's summons by Antony to appear before him in Laodicea.[163] Antony was the lover of Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt,[164] which may explain Yohanan's departure to Babylon/Egypt.
- Joseph's 'crime' and Miriam's 'terrible mistake' reflect the severity of their transgression, and the mention of the lack of witnesses suggests that a trial was held, as recorded by Josephus and in *The Infancy Gospel of James*. Miriam's mistake matches the description of Sophia as the 'erring' aeon, as quoted in section 3.2.

Returning to the statement concerning Christ's mother:

> His mother was Stada. But his mother was Miriam the hairdresser?

There are two possible alternative interpretations as opposed to the interpretation suggested in the Talmud. Firstly, the Romans had numerous gods, both male and female, and one of the latter was called **Stata Mater**,[165] which can be loosely translated as 'the Standing Mother' from the Latin *sto stare steti statum*, meaning 'to stand'[166] or *status*, meaning 'a standing' or 'standing position,'[167] and *mater matris*, meaning 'a mother.'[168] Stata Mater was the Roman goddess who protected against fire and of whom a statue had been erected in Rome's Forum. She was associated with Vulcan, the Roman god of fire. Stata Mater may have been a nickname given by the Romans to Mary (Mariamne I), who was the mother of Christ, the man who burned cities across Israel (see chapter 9). It is also possible that the name Stata Mater simply meant 'the Mother of the Standing One,' i.e., the mother of Simon Magus, the Standing One (see section 2.4).

That Mariamne I (the mother of Christ) was often confused with Mariamne II is evident from the second statement, which most likely is a reference to Mariamne II (Mary Magdalene, see chapter 7). The original Aramaic text of **Miriam the dresser of women's hair** reads **Miriam *megadela neshaya*** or *Miriam m'gaddela nashaia*,[169] and because of the phonetic similarity, some have identified her with Mary Magdalene. The 'hairdresser' interpretation seems to have been derived from the Hebrew words *maggâl*,[170] meaning 'to reap/a sickle,' and *dallâh*,[171] meaning 'hair,' while the words *'ishshâh*,[172] meaning 'a woman, adulteress,' and the plural *nâshîyn*,[173] meaning 'women,' appear to be the root of *neshaya*.

It is possible that it was known that Mary Magdalene had beautiful hair (see section 7.2), hence the Talmudic translation. In fact, *megadela* can also be viewed as a combination of *meged*,[174] which means 'to be eminent or distinguished, precious (fruit),' and *dallâh*, rendering 'She with the distinguished hair,' suggesting that she had beautiful hair. The most likely origin of the name Magdalene, the Latin description 'Magi de lena,' is discussed in section 6.3.

The reference to Mary as a hairdresser may also have originated from an incorrect interpretation of the Latin verb ***tendo tendere***, meaning 'to stretch, extend, spread'[175] as the Latin ***tondeo tondere***, which means 'to shear/clip/shave (hair).'[176] The first verb would in context again refer to Caius Pansa, but it could be that the 'spread out' connection was lost over time to be replaced by the more logical 'hairdresser.' The latter interpretation would have made sense, as Mariamne II (Mary Magdalene) appears to have been renowned for her beautiful hair, and recollections of this aspect of her must no doubt have survived in oral traditions for a long time.

That the mother of Christ was supposed to have 'died before her time' but did not is suggested by the following excerpts from the Talmud:

> When Rab Joseph came to this verse, he wept, There is that is destroyed without justice. He said, **Is there any who has departed before his time**? None but this [told] of Rab Bibi bar Abaji. The Angel of Death was with him. The Angel said to his messenger, 'Go, bring me **Miriam the dresser of women's hair.**' He brought him **Miriam, the teacher of children**. He [the Angel] said, 'I told thee **Miriam the dresser of women's hair.**' He said, 'If so, **I will take this one back**.' He said, 'Since thou has brought this one, let her be among the number [of the dead].'
>
> The Angel of Death was with him: he related what had already happened, for this about **Miriam the dresser of women's hair** took place in [the time of] the second temple, **for she was the mother of a certain person**, as it is said in Shabbath.[177,178]

From these excerpts it would appear that Miriam, the mother of Christ, was destined to either be killed or somehow narrowly escape death, but another person died in her place. It is unthinkable that an innocent young woman would have been killed in Mariamne's place but much more likely that the body of a deceased young woman was presented as Mariamne's. How Mariamne had been executed is not related by Josephus, but witnesses' accounts of the corpse of a young woman seen only from a distance would probably have sufficed to convince Herod that his wife was dead.

It is, however, possible that the author of these passages merely confused Miriam, the teacher of children (possibly Mariamne I) with Miriam, the dresser of women's hair (Mariamne II). In that case Mariamne I would have been the one who died (or was believed to have been executed), whilst Mariamne II was spared by the Angel of Death (Herod divorced her, while he certainly could have ordered

her execution). The Miriam who taught children could very well have been Mariamne I, who had four children of ages less than four or five years when she was supposedly executed.

In conclusion, the Talmudic accounts as listed above provide the following links between Mary, Joseph, and Herod:

- Mary was married, and her husband was known as Pappos ben Judah (Herod the Great).
- Christ's father was Pandira (Caius Pansa, mistaken for his son-in-law Joseph, the actual father of Christ).
- The father (Christ's) was a Roman soldier (from Ligarius, the Roman soldier).
- Joseph was a carpenter (Ligarius misinterpreted as *lignarius*, Latin for a carpenter).
- His mother was known as the Standing Mother (and, therefore, was Simon Magus called the Standing One?).

3

Mary, the Mother of God

> Yet she [Mariamne] was a woman somewhat rough in nature and treated her husband [Herod the Great] imperiously enough
>
> —Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*

> If I [Mary] am a bitch in heat…if I am a bit of coarse stuff that has been patched on thy robe
>
> —Gnostic John the Baptizer

In the preceding chapter, it was shown that a brief affair between Herod's treasurer Joseph and Herod's wife, Mariamne I, led to the birth of Jesus Christ. Mariamne must have been fully aware of the risk she would face if found out, so it is necessary to delve deeper into her motivation for becoming involved with another man. We learn a great deal about the young, rebellious Mariamne in two sets of work, namely: in the Gnostic teachings about Mary and the *Pistis Sophia* texts, which are based on the early life of Christ. It is also necessary to take a close look at Christ's siblings and the disciples he chose to follow him.

3.1 The Mandaean Apostasy of Mary

The Mandaeans belonged to a religious sect that was believed to have come into existence during the first centuries of the Christian era, and they are presently the only survivors of the Gnostic movement.[1] Their dualistic view of the spiritual world includes the World of Light pitched against the World of Darkness, a king of Light, and a king of Darkness. Although there are many similarities between Mandaean and Christian beliefs, the Mandaeans unequivocally condemned Christ as a false prophet:

> And they loved the Lord, that is, Adonai, until in the House of Israel **there was created something in the womb of Mary**, a daughter of Moses. It was hidden in her womb for nine months and bewitched her until the nine months were fulfilled **and she was in labour and brought forth a messiah**.
>
> And he called the people to himself and spoke of his death and took away some of the mysteries of the [Sacred] Meal and abstained from the Food. And he took to himself a people **and was called by the name of the False Messiah.** And he perverted them all and made them like himself who perverted words of life and changed them into darkness and even perverted those accounted Mine. And he overturned all the rites. And he and his brother dwell on Mount Sinai, and he joineth all races to him, and perverteth and joineth to himself a people, and they are called Christians.[2]

The reason for their rejection of Christ must certainly be that they knew exactly who Jesus Christ was.

Following their release from captivity in Babylon by Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, when he conquered the city in 538 BCE,[3] a strong Jewish influence, if not presence, would have remained in Babylon. The Jews remaining in Babylon would have been exposed to the culture and religion of their new rulers, the Persians, and it is very likely that the Magi who visited Herod came from this group of worldly wise people. Joseph's exposure to them would have introduced him to their culture, which he appears to have found more appealing than that of his native country.

When the Magi returned from Judea with a beautiful young queen of Herod the Great, along with her infant son, the Jewish community in Babylon would have been abuzz with rumours about what must have happened back in Judea. They would have watched the

young boy grow up before their eyes, and because of his ancestry and also his diminutive and misshapen figure (see section 6.1), he would have been remembered well. So, when news about his activities in Israel reached Babylon decades later, they would immediately have recognised him as a fraud (he was not the Son of God, and they probably knew Mary's true story).

Various Gnostic texts contain traditions about Miriai (Miryai)'s conversion from Judaism to Mandaeism, specifically as recorded in *Gnostic John the Baptizer*[4] and 'The Mandaean Appropriation of Jesus's Mother, Miriai'[5]. In *Gnostic John the Baptizer,* the story of Mary's breach with Judaism is recorded, beginning with her own words:

> Miryai am I, of the Kings of Babel a daughter, a daughter of Jerusalem's mighty rulers. They have given me birth; the priests brought me up. In the fold of their robe they carried me up into the dark house, into the temple. Adonai laid a charge on my hands and on my two arms: I must scour and cleanse the house [that is] without firmness. There is naught therein for supporting the poor, naught to revive the tormented souls.
>
> My father went to the house of the people, my mother went to the temple. My father went out and said to me, and my mother went out and charged me: Miryai, close thy inner doors and bolt the bar. See that thou goest not forth into the main streets and that the suns of my Lord fall not upon thee.
>
> But I, Miryai, listened not to what my mother did tell me, and hearkened not with the ear to what my father did charge me. I opened the inner doors, and the outer let I stand open. Out went I into the main streets and the suns of my Lord fell upon me. To the house of the people would I not go, but my way bore me unto the temple [of the Mandæans]. I went and I found my brothers and

sisters, how they stand and carry on proclamations. My brothers carry on proclamations and my sisters throw out explanations. With the voice of their proclamations and with the voice of their explanations I became drowsy and laid me down on the spot. My brothers went forth and did not wake me, and my sisters withdrew and roused me not. But thou, my sister in Truth, dost rouse me from sleep and dost say: Arise, arise, Miryai, before the day breaks and the cock lets crow his morn-call, before the sun shines and his glory rises over the worlds, before the priests and the priests' sons go forth and sit them down in the shade of the Ruins - Jerusalem, before thy father comes and brings upset upon thee such as thou never hast had.

I, Miryai, keep secret my prayers and utterly secret keep my discourses.

Mary's father discovers her disobedience and addresses her harshly, but she remains defiant:

Where hast come from, thou debauched trough, **whom [? locks] and bars [cannot keep in]**? Where hast thou come from? Woe [unto thee], thou bitch in heat, **who [? mindest] not [door-] pins and lockings**! Where hast thou come from? Woe, woe [unto thee], **thou bit of coarse stuff that has been patched on my robe**!

If I am a debauched trough, I will burst thy [boltings] and bars. If I am a bitch in heat, I will draw back the pins and the lockings. **If I am a bit of coarse stuff that has been patched on thy robe**, then out of thy robe cut and rip me.

Thereon he cried: Come, look on Miryai, **who has left Jewry and gone to make love with her lord**. Come, look on Miryai, who has left off coloured raiment and gone

to make love with her lord. She forsook gold and silver and went to make love with her lord. She forsook the phylacteries and **went to make love with the man with the head-band**.

Then Miryai makes answer unto him: Far lies it from me to love him whom I have hated. Far lies it from me to hate him whom I have loved. **Nay, far from me lies it to hate my Lord, the Life's Gnosis, who is for me in the world a support. A support is he in the world for me and a helper in the Light's region**. Dust in the mouth of the Jews, ashes in the mouth of all of the priests! May the dung that is under the feet of the horses, come on the high ones and Jerusalem's mighty rulers.

Mary's mother likewise confronts her daughter:

At the door of the house of the people her mother came upon Miryai. Her mother came upon Miryai and put question to her: Whence com'st thou, my daughter, Miryai, whose face gathers roses? Roses gather thy face and of sleep are thy eyes full. Full of sleep are thy eyes, and upon thy forehead lies slumber.

Thereon she made answer: It is two, three days today that my brothers sat down in the house of my Father. In my Father's house sat down my brothers and let wonderful proclamations be heard. **Because of the voice and the ringing of the proclamation of the treasures**, my brothers, there comes no sleep over my eyes. Sleep comes not over my eyes, nor slumber upon my forehead.

Hast thou not heard, Miryai, my daughter, what the Jews are saying about thee? The Jews are saying: **Thy daughter has fallen in love with a man**. **She has gotten hate against Jewry and love for Nazo-ræanity**. Hate has

she gotten against the house of the people and love for the door of the temple. Hate has she gotten against the phylacteries and love for the flaunting wreaths. Work does she on Sabbath; on Sunday she keeps her hands still. **Miryai has cast aside straightway the Law** that the Seven have laid [upon us].

As Miryai stands there, she puts dust on her feet, and speaks: Dust in the mouth of the Jews and ashes in the mouth of all of the priests! May the dung that lies under the horses, come on the elders who are in Jerusalem! **I cannot hate him whose love I have won**, **nor love him against whom I have gotten hate**. Yea, I have won the love of my Lord the Life's Gnosis, [and hope] that in him a helper will for me arise, a helper and a support from the region of Darkness unto **Light's region**.

Miryai is then found at the mouth of the Euphrates, where a white eagle addresses her and her newfound supporters:

Miryai am I, a vine, a tree, who stands at the mouth of Euphrates (Frash). The tree's leaves are precious stones, the tree's fruits pearls.…How fair is the tree of Life and fair the birds who dwell on it!…

A white eagle-bird came, looked down and caught sight of the birds. Round wheeled he, sped down on them with his wings, and came and sat on the tree.…

…[and answered them] Well for you, ye birds, who hold fast to this vine [here]; you became a companionship of Miryai, the vine, who stands at the mouth of Euphrates.…I have come to heal Miryai, [come] to bring water to the good, beloved plants, to the vines, who stand at the mouth of Euphrates. Well for him who has drunk of my water.…Woe to those who have not gone forward

upon the Way; woe to those who have not passed on by the way-stone! They hated Life's **Treasure-House**, Miryai, the dear Truth. My brothers, hold fast, be a companionship of Miryai. I will look round in the world, let Life's call sound forth and rouse the sleeping and wake [them].

The eagle flew off from the tree; he wheeled round and instructed his friends. He speaks to them: **Give ear to me, my brothers**! Stay fast and endure persecution. Be a companionship to Miryai. Woe to the Jews, who were a persecution for Miryai! Woe to Elizar, the great house, the pillar that props the temple! Woe to **Zatan, the pillar, who has witnessed lies against Miryai**!

The Jews are extremely upset with these developments:

All the Jews gathered together, the teachers, the great and the little; they came [together] and spake of Miryai: She ran away from the priests, fell in love with a man, and they took hold of each other's hands. Hold of each other's hands they took, went forth and settled at the mouth of Euphrates. We will slay them and make Miryai scorned in Jerusalem. A stake will we set up for the man who has ruined Miryai and led her away. There shall be no day in the world when a stranger enters Jerusalem.

All the Jews gathered together and followed after Miryai. They went and found that a throne was set up for Miryai on the bank of Euphrates. A white standard was for her unfurled and a book stood upright on her lap. She reads in the Books of Truth and rouses all worlds from their sleep. She holds in her hand the staff of Life's water; the girdle is bound round her loins. Miryai in humbleness prays and proclaims with wondrous voice. The fishes gather out of the sea, the birds from the mouth of

Euphrates. They come to hear Miryai's voice, and no more long to lie down to sleep. They breathe in the sweet scent around her and forget the world. When the Jews saw this, they stood up before her. They felt shamed, doubled their fists, smote on the fore-court of their breast and lamented. The mother of Miryai spoke, and tears streamed into her bosom,…

Look on me, Miryai, my daughter, says she unto her; look on me who am thy mother! My daughter art thou and the daughter of all of the priests. Thy head is the great chief of the temple. Rememberest thou not, Miryai, that the Torah lay on thy lap? Thou didst open it, read therein and knewest what stands in it. The outer keys lay in thy hands, and the inner thou didst put in chains. All the priests and priests' sons came and kissed thy hand. For whom thou wouldst, thou didst open the door; whom thou wouldst not, must turn and go back to his seat. A thousand stand there and two thousand sit there. They submit themselves to thee, as a eunuch-made slave, and they give ear to thy word in Jerusalem. Why didst thou forget thy brothers and thy heart abandon the priests? Lo, the brides weep in Judæa, the women and men in Jerusalem. Their beloved gold have they cast from them, and they give themselves up to wailing and mourning for thee. They say: We will make away with our goods, until Miryai returns.…My daughter, arise, come back to thy dwelling-place, the city Jerusalem. Come, light up thy lamps, which have been put out from the day when thou withdrewest thyself. Have no longing after this man, who has prisoned thee and taken thee off. Leave the man, who is not of thy dwelling-place, alone by himself in the world. Let him not say: I have gone and carried off Miryai from her place. Come, teach the

children, so that they may learn. Lay the Torah in thy lap and let us hear thy voice as it used to be.

Miryai responds to her mother's plea and to the Jews who are with her:

Go, go, says she unto them, ye fools, ye abortions, ye who were not of the world. I am no woman who is stripped for wantoning; and it is not that I have fallen in love with a man. Stripped am I not for returning to you and for again seeing you, doming of blasphemy. Go, go hence from me, ye who have witnessed falsehood and lying against me. Against me ye witnessed wantonness and thieving, and held me up as ye are yourselves. **Blessed be the man who freed me from my fetters and planted my feet here.** No wantonness have I committed with him and attempted no theft in the world. Instead of the witness ye have witnessed against me, there come to me prayer and praise-giving.

The Jews are then destroyed by the white eagle:

As the priests stand there and speak with Miryai at the mouth of Euphrates, there came a pure eagle-bird, whose wings are the fullness of worlds. He flew down on the Jews, dashed at them with his wings, bound them and sank them down unto the water's bottom, deeper [down] than the foul-smelling mud. He sank them deeper down than the blazing [water], that is inside the dark water. He sank their ships down to the blazing water's bottom. **He destroyed the temple and laid fire to Jerusalem. He brought down all upon them and in Jerusalem slew the disciples**.

The eagle finally addresses Mary:

> Miryai, with favour look upon me, remember me in the Life's presence. I am thy Good Messenger, the Man, who gives ear to thy discourse. I beseech thee for the high Truth, **the Truth which the Jordans have chosen**.

From these accounts the following crucial observations can be made:

- Miryai was of royal descent (of the kings of Babel and daughter of a ruler of Jerusalem), as was Mariamne, the wife of Herod the Great, and she was brought up by the priests of the temple. The mention of Babel suggests that she spent some time in Persia.
- Emphasis is placed on the fact that Miryai was locked up behind bars, as was Mariamne by Herod during his absence. The 'father' who accused her of being a whore most likely was Herod himself (her biological father had long been dead), who was certainly old enough to be her father and whom she most likely mocked as such (see Josephus's description at the beginning of this chapter of her rudeness towards Herod). The robe he refers to must certainly be the royal robes worn by the kings of the Jews.[6]
- Miryai's mother reproached her in the presence of the Jews, as did Alexandra reproach Mariamne in court. In the Mandaean version, the words are hardly those of a mother who wished to see her daughter executed. In fact, the exact opposite seems to have been the case. Her tears may very well have been caused by the realization of what would happen to her daughter.
- As mentioned by Josephus, Mariamne 'was a woman somewhat (a bit) rough in nature,' which are almost verbatim the words used by Miryai's father, describing her as 'a bit of coarse stuff.' It would seem that she was widely known to be a bit coarse at times.

- The man with the headband appears to be a description of a man who had served as a high priest, who wore a golden headband known as a *tzitz*.[7] Joseph, the father of Christ, was recorded as having served as a priest and was most likely the Joseph ben Ulam, who had served as high priest for a single day (see section 2.2). Joseph might have kept his *tzitz* as a souvenir and may later even have worn it publicly as a symbol of his contempt of the Jewish religious establishment. From the preceding description of Mary's apostasy, it is clear that Joseph had at some stage in his life converted to the Mandaean religion. It could very well be that the Magi from the East who visited Jerusalem were close friends or associates of Joseph. Joseph, as Herod's treasurer, would no doubt have been exposed to peoples and religions outside Israel and may have found the Mandaean religion more appealing than the Jewish religion. The Man with the Headband may have been a nickname he had earned amongst the Jews.
- It is inconceivable that a pious, unknown young woman from the general population would have had the courage to vocalise her contempt for the king and the priesthood of the Jews unless she was well familiar with them, as was Mariamne. Any other young woman who dared to do so would probably have been stoned to death.
- Miryai refers to the 'proclamations of treasure' in her father's house (Herod's), and an eagle later to 'Life's Treasure-House.' These references were most likely distorted recollections by the author of the document of Herod's treasury, which was run by Joseph, the man with whom Mary had fallen in love.
- A throne had been set up for Miryai, suggesting that this was a new throne set up for a queen who had abandoned the throne in the house of her husband. In other words, she was recognised as a queen.

- The texts suggest that Miryai had eunuchs as slaves, as had Mariamne. In ancient times the word 'eunuch' generally referred to a palace official who may or may not have been castrated,[8] which means that Miryai used to live in a palace before she joined the populace.
- Miryai's mother begs her to return to teaching the children. This echoes the passage in the Talmud that asserts that it was 'Miriam, the teacher of children,' who either died or was to be executed.
- Miriai had fallen in love with a man who took her away and introduced her to new beliefs. In *The Infancy Gospel of James*, it is stated that Joseph took Mary to his own house, which matches the Mandaean account. Her words 'I cannot hate him whose love I have won, nor love him against whom I have gotten hate' agree with Josephus's account in which Mariamne had developed a hatred for Herod, to the point of threatening to commit suicide should he touch her again. Joseph, evidently a charming and sensitive man compared to Herod (who only used her for sex), appears to have won her affections. It seems that she equated her lover with the white eagle, and he referred to her as 'Life's Treasure-House.' This particular choice of words would be ever so true for a man who was master of a real treasure house but found unexpected love with this beautiful young girl. His words 'Woe to Zatan, the pillar, who has witnessed lies against Miryai!' likewise would apply directly to Herod, who had earlier accused her of having an improper relationship with Joseph, his brother-in-law, and probably even every man she smiled at.
- Of all the people who surrounded her, Joseph, through his connections, would probably have been the only person in a position to snatch Mariamne away from the clutches of Herod, hence her words 'Blessed be the man who freed me from my fetters [quite literally] and planted my feet here.'

- The Jews gathered and threatened to kill Miryai and the man who seduced her to this new religion. This matches Mariamne's trial and subsequent death sentence.
- *Gnostic John the Baptizer* also relates that Miriai (Miryai) and two men called **Jaqif** and **Ben Amin** approached John the Baptist for advice about the future of the Mandaean 'message.' In 'The Mandaean Appropriation of Jesus's Mother, Miriai,' Miriai is the daughter of the Eleazer, **who plans to massacre his daughter and her fellow believers, but some of them (including Miriai) escape**. Two men were therefore associated with Miriai, as was Mariamne with the two men who were supposed to guard her, Joseph and Sohemus. Most significantly, though, it was recorded here that Miriai escaped death, as evidently did Mariamne.
- The white eagle that came to Miryai's rescue appears to be a symbolic figure in the Mandaean religion but was used by Miryai as an alias for Joseph, her lover. It is perhaps more than coincidence, however, that the symbol of the Roman Empire during the reign of Augustus (the same one whose rule began around the time when Mariamne was 'executed' and whose famous decree for a census to be held is mentioned in the Bible, see section 4.1) was a white eagle.[9] It is possible that Miryai used this symbolism to warn the Jews that she would be protected by the Roman Empire through Joseph. If Joseph had indeed been married to a Roman citizen (a daughter of Pansa), he may have become a Roman citizen himself. Herod most likely spared Joseph for two reasons: his importance as treasurer and his ties to the Romans. Having Joseph executed would have put his own life in danger.
- A more likely scenario is that the document was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the prophetic words about its destruction by the Romans were deliberately attributed to Mary to bolster her story. It is also possible, though highly improbable, that Mary had then already envisaged that her son would

return to avenge the murder of her family (the Hasmoneans) by Herod. In the end her son did return to Israel, repeatedly claiming to be the Light of the World,[10] very much a Mandaean concept.

3.2 The Pistis Sophia

The name **Sophia** has since ancient times been associated with **wisdom**,[11] the very thing the young Mariamne seemed to have admired and desired. As will be shown, Christ wove the story of his divine birth around this fictional Sophia through a conflation of various beliefs of that time with the actual circumstances of his own birth from Mariamne.

Irenaeus, in his book *Against Heresies*,[12] relates the story of the fall of Sophia through the involvement of an aeon (an eternal spiritual being) called Nous. Nous, meaning 'the intellect' or 'the mind' in Greek,[13] is referred to as the Father and the Beginning of All Things, and Sophia, amongst other descriptions, is described as 'the Lightsome Mother,'[14] possibly a reference to the 'treasury of the light' referred to below. According to Irenaeus (my comments in square brackets):

> Nous alone took pleasure in contemplating the father, and exulting in considering his immeasurable greatness; while he also meditated how he might communicate to the rest of the Aeons the greatness of the Father, revealing to them how vast and mighty he was…But Sige[15] ['silence'] restrained him [from doing so].…In like manner, the rest of the Aeons also, in a kind of quiet way, had a wish to behold the Author of their being, and to contemplate that First Cause which had no beginning.
>
> But there rushed forth in advance of the rest that Aeon who was much the latest of them, and was the youngest.…namely Sophia, and suffered passion apart

> from the embrace of her consort Theletos, 'Self-Willed,' [from the Greek word *thelo*, 'will, determine'[16]]. This passion…first arose among those who were connected with Nous but passed as contagion to this degenerate Aeon, who acted under a pretence of love, but was in reality influenced by temerity, because she had not, like Nous, enjoyed communion with the perfect Father. This passion, they say, consisted in a desire to search into the nature of the Father; for she wished, according to them, to comprehend his greatness. When she could not attain her end,… In an extreme agony of the mind, she was ever stretching herself forward…and that then, having with difficulty been brought back to herself, she was convinced that the Father was incomprehensible, and so laid aside her original design, along with that passion which had arisen within her from the overwhelming influence of her admiration.
>
> But others fabulously describe the passion and restoration of Sophia as follows: They say that she, having engaged in an impossible and impractical attempt, brought forth an amorphous substance, such as her female nature enabled her to produce. When she looked upon it, her first feeling was one of grief, on account of the imperfection of its generation, and then of fear lest this should end her own existence [some render this obscure clause, 'lest it should never attain perfection'[17]]. Next she lost all command of herself, and was in the greatest perplexity while endeavouring to discover the cause of all this, and in what way she may conceal what had happened. Being greatly harassed by these passions, she at last changed her mind and endeavoured to return anew to the Father. When, however, she in some measure made the attempt, strength failed her, and she became a suppliant of the Father. The

> other Aeons, Nous in particular, presented their supplications along with her. And hence they declare material substance had its beginning from ignorance and grief, and fear and bewilderment.

This seduction or leading astray of Sophia, also known as the 'erring aeon,'[18] is presented in greater detail in the Gnostic text known as *Pistis Sophia*,[19] wherein Christ is presented as teaching his disciples **after** his crucifixion:

> It came to pass, when Jesus had risen from the dead, **that he passed eleven years discoursing with his disciples**,…

In this lengthy text, Christ instructs his disciples on the Mount of Olives about the regions of the **First Mystery**, whence he came, and in which the Father appears in the form of a dove. This First Mystery, amongst other entities, encompassed 'the **Treasury** of the Light,' a place that had **guards at every gate**. Christ relates that at the command of the First Mystery, he looked down upon mankind and **found Mary, his mother** 'according to the body of matter.' He cast the twelve powers of the Treasury of the Light into the spheres of the rulers, but **Mary was born** '**without the souls of the rulers**' in her.

Christ, having 'ascended to the great aeons of the rulers,' eventually found Pistis Sophia in the **thirteenth aeon**, where by the command of the First Mystery, she saw the light of the veil of the Treasury of the Light and longed to reach that region but could not do so. She then '**ceased to perform the mystery of the thirteenth aeon**, and **sang praises to the light of the height**, which she had seen in the light of the veil of the Treasury of the Light.'

The rulers of the twelve aeons below her hated her for having ceased from their mysteries and because she 'had desired to go into the height and be above them all.' The great, triple-powered

Self-Willed who was also to be found in the thirteenth aeon and indeed desired to rule the thirteenth aeon, **likewise hated Sophia for her desertion**. He emanated a great lion-faced power to, together with others, lie in wait of Sophia and 'take away her power out of her.' She was delivered to him, who then devoured all the light-powers in Sophia and thrust her matter [body] into the [region of] chaos.

In a series of 'repentances,' Sophia called upon the Light to save her:

> And all the rulers of the aeons mocked me. And I was in that region, mourning and seeking after the light which I had seen in the height. And **the guards of the gates** of the aeons searched for me, and all who remain in their mystery mocked me.…Save me out of the matter of this darkness…**that I may be saved from** the emanations of **the Self-Willed** which press me sore

Christ eventually responded to her pleas:

> It came to pass then, when Pistis Sophia had uttered the seventh repentance in the chaos, that the commandment through the First Mystery had not come to me to save her and lead her up out of the chaos. Nevertheless of myself out of my compassion I led her into **a somewhat spacious region of chaos**.…When this took place, Pistis Sophia did not know that I was her helper; nor did she know me at all, but she kept singing praises to the Light of the Treasury,… on which she had had faith.

The oppression of Sophia by the rulers, however, continued, and they ultimately sought to 'take away her light from her utterly.' Her prayers were answered in the end:

> The First Mystery hearkened unto her, and I was sent off at his command. I came to help her, and led her out of the chaos…For this cause I was sent forth at the command of the First Mystery **to help her secretly**. I did not, however, yet go to the regions of the aeons at all; but I passed down through the midst out of them, **without any single power knowing it**,…save only the First Mystery.…
>
> …that the time was fulfilled that she should be led out of the chaos.…And my light-power, which I had sent to lead up Sophia out of the chaos, shone exceedingly.

Christ's light-power became a light-wreath that protected Sophia from the emanations of the Self-Willed, and Sophia continued to sing songs of praise, 'for the Light is with me, and I myself am with the Light.' Sophia was finally delivered when Christ and the First Mystery sent out a second light-power to assist the first in rescuing Sophia.

It would appear that Christ and his mother concocted the story of *Pistis Sophia* in order to explain Christ's divine origins, and they based this story on the events that led to Mary's 'execution.' From the *Pistis Sophia* account, we can conclude:

- The references to a Treasury (of Light) and 'guards at the gate' can be linked to Joseph, the master of the treasury and the man who had led Mary astray. Mary (Mariamne) was indeed 'guarded by the guards at the gate.'
- Sophia had deserted her faith ('ceased to perform the mysteries of the aeons'), exactly as the Mandaeans claimed Miryai had lost her faith in Judaism. The aeons were extremely upset at this development, as were the Jews about Miryai's apostasy.
- The 'triple-powered Self-Willed' matches Herod, who was with her in the thirteenth aeon (as her husband) and who had threatened and persecuted her through those under his command.
- Sophia is referred to as the latest or youngest of the aeons. According to Irenaeus there were thirty aeons in the family.[20] This number, along with the thirteenth aeon in which Christ found Sophia (referring to a time frame in this context), appears to have been derived from the Hasmonean family tree (see figure 3.1). This family tree lists what appear to be the most prominent members of the Hasmonean family as known to Josephus's generation, and if everyone from Hasmon down to Mariamne's children is included, the family members number thirty (Herod is included as Theletos, the cuckolded consort of Sophia). The name Theletos is most likely a combination of the Greek words *thelo* (to determine, wish, will)[21] and *tis*[22] (any man or person, he, whosoever), which would mean 'He who determines,' matching the 'Self-Willed' from whom Sophia was trying to escape.
- Along the same vein, Mariamne was the last Hasmonean to be king or queen and also the thirteenth direct descendant of Hasmon if the spouses are included, which matches the thirteenth aeon in which she was found by Christ. It would seem that Mariamne was obsessed not only with God (her 'desire to search into the nature of the Father') but also with her royal origins, as is evident from the aeons. Upon her return to Israel, she would attempt to reinstate her son as king of the Jews.

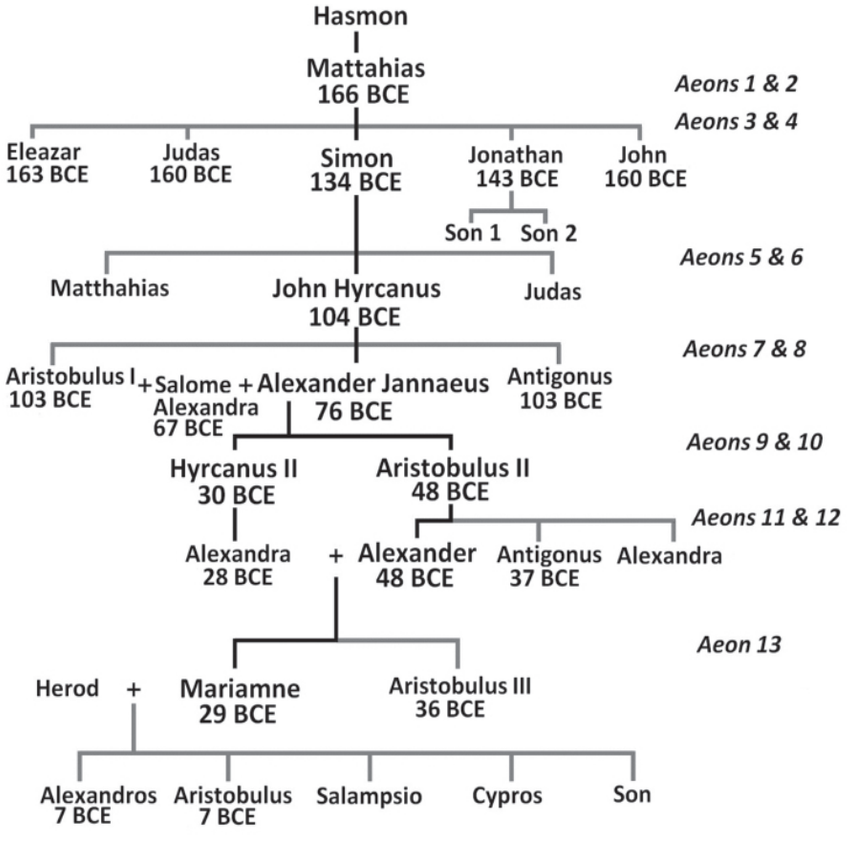

Figure 3.1. Royal descent of Mariamne,[23] showing marriage (+), year of death (date below name), and bloodline (mother and father, *Aeons*)

- The Mandaean accounts of Miryai's joy at having found a new religion through the 'man who led her away' would explain why she thought of him as Nous, the intelligent one, the father (of Christ), and the beginning of all things (a new life). Joseph in the end not only saved her from Herod, but assuming that he was also of (distant) Hasmonean descent, Joseph gave her a true Hasmonean heir to the throne. Through this son Mary could potentially reclaim the throne once Herod the usurper had died. Even though Joseph as Nous was never a part of the Hasmonean royal family, and Sophia was heralded as the last of the aeons, who would have been her last son in figure 3.1, it seems that Mariamne and her son based the idea of the aeons on her royal family and named the individuals according to prominent persons in her life.
- The Mandaean text claims that Miryai 'prays and proclaims with wondrous voice…They come to hear Miryai's voice.' Sophia likewise sang numerous songs of praise, and in the New Testament, we find a record of 'Mary's Song.'[24] It would appear that Mary actually loved singing, and her songs made such an impact on those around her that this was recorded in most legends and accounts about her.
- On a less complimentary note, the Mandaean text describes Christ as '**something created in the womb of Mary**,' suggesting that even as a baby he was of unsightly appearance. Sophia is likewise recorded as having given birth to an '**amorphous substance**,' which she must have been shocked and grief-stricken to see. 'When she looked upon it, her first feeling was one of grief, on account of the imperfection of its generation.' As discussed in section 6.1, various church fathers and early Christian writers wrote about the ugly appearance and deformed body of Christ.
- For the reasons above, one can come to no other conclusion than that Miryai (Mary) and Sophia were one and the same person.

The link between Christ and Sophia is echoed by the relationship between Simon Magus and Luna, as reported in the Clementine *Recognitions* (see sections 5.1 and 5.2). Here the aeon family of thirty members is referred to as the thirty disciples of Dositheus, and Luna (meaning 'The Obstinate One' in Hebrew) is unequivocally identified with Wisdom (Sophia), the mother of all things.

3.3 Additional Remarks Regarding the Parents of Jesus Christ

It is necessary to make the following concluding remarks regarding the parents of Jesus Christ:

- A valid question would be whether the name **Mariamne** can be linked to the name **Mary**. Apart from the phonetic similarities and the likelihood that Mary is simply a shortened version of **Mari**(amne), we have two accounts in which the name Mariamne is linked to Mary Magdalene and possibly also to Mary, the mother of Christ. In *The Acts of Philip* we read:

> It came to pass when the Saviour divided the apostles and each went forth according to his lot, that it fell to Philip to go to the country of the Greeks: and he thought it hard, and wept. And **Mariamne** his sister (it was she that made ready the bread and salt at the breaking of bread, but **Martha** was she that ministered to the multitudes and laboured much) seeing it, went to Jesus and said: Lord, seest thou not how my brother is vexed?[25]

The only two women by those names who were closely associated with Christ were Mary Magdalene and her sister Martha. Hippolytos, in his *Refutation of All Heresies*, wrote:

> These are the heads of very numerous discourses which (the Naassene) asserts James the brother of the Lord handed down to **Mariamne**. In order, then, that these impious (heretics) may no longer belie **Mariamne** or James, or the Saviour Himself, let us come to the mystic rites (whence these have derived their figment)[26]

In this instance the person in question could be Mary, the mother of Christ, but in the context of the apostolic missions and other apocryphal texts, it seems to refer to Mary Magdalene instead, who was indeed known as Mariamne (Mariamne II). A further link between the names Mary and Mariamne is given

by Mary's name in the Koran, where she is called Maryam.[27] This clearly is an abbreviated form of Mariam(ne).

- As recorded in *The Gospel of Nicodemus*,[28] the Jews accused Christ of having been born through fornication (extramarital sex) and also of being a magician (see section 2.4), suggesting that the Jews knew exactly who his biological parents were.
- The Koran[29] relates that Mary had withdrawn from her family 'to a place in the East' to give birth to her child but was reprimanded when she eventually reappeared with the infant:

> How shall I have a son…seeing that…I am not unchaste?…O Mary! **Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought**! O sister of Aaron, thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!

possibly implying that she was indeed a 'woman unchaste,' or a harlot.[30]

The reaction of the people at the sight of her baby is also very telling—the description 'an amazing thing' matches the description of Sophia having brought forth an 'amorphous substance' as well as the Mandaean account that 'something' was created in the womb of Mary. One has to conclude that the baby must have been exceptionally ugly and deformed, and Christ was most likely referred to in such terms (a 'thing') by his enemies, even as an adult.

- Celsus, according to Origen,[31] claimed that it was the Chaldeans and not the Magi who came to see the newborn king of the Jews:

> [The] Chaldeans are spoken of by Jesus as having been induced to come to him at his birth, and to worship him while yet an infant as a God, and to have made this known

> to Herod the tetrarch; and that the latter sent and slew all the infants that had been born about the same time, thinking that in this way he would ensure his death among the others; and that he was led to do this through fear that, if Jesus lived to a sufficient age, he would obtain the throne.

At first glance, Celsus appears to be placing the birth of Christ during the reign of Herod the Tetrarch (4 BCE–39 CE) instead of Herod the Great, as is commonly accepted. The Bible records that Christ returned to Egypt following the death of Herod, who can only be Herod the Great. Herod the Tetrarch (Herod Antipas) was the successor of the Herod the Great, and the text implies that Christ would literally be a contender to the throne, confirming that he was of royal descent. The Chaldeans were masters of reading and writing and especially versed in all forms of incantation, in sorcery, witchcraft, and the magical arts.[32] Some ancient authors used the term Chaldean to denote amongst others priests educated in classical Babylonian literature, specifically in traditions of astronomy and astrology.[33] The association of the Magi with Chaldea suggests that the Magi had originated from that country, and that if Mariamne had indeed escaped with these Magi, they would have returned to the land of the Chaldeans, present-day Iraq.

It is appropriate to conclude this section with Christ's claim to divinity—his birth through Mary and the Holy Spirit.[34] In order to be able to atone for the original sin, through which all of mankind was condemned to eternal death, Christ had to be free of sin. As such, he had to be of divine origins. Incidentally, most likely in response to arguments that Christ would have been half-tainted by sin because of his human mother Mary, the Roman Catholic Church ingeniously argues that Mary, too, came into the world free of sin, through the Immaculate Conception:

> The Blessed Virgin Mary…in the first instance of her conception…was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin…by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race.[35]

Matthew links the virgin birth of Christ to one of the most contentious 'prophecies' in the Bible, that of Isaiah, which states:

> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.[36]

Scholars have long argued that the word *'almâh*,[37] usually translated as 'virgin,' actually means 'young woman' or simply a woman about to be married.[38] This particular verse is invariably viewed in isolation, but the next couple of verses make it abundantly clear that this 'prophecy' was aimed at the immediate future and had nothing to do with a future Messiah:

> He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to eject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

This event evidently took place around 732 BCE,[39] which would only prove that the 'prophecy' was recorded *post facto* by Jewish chroniclers. Of particular interest is that there is no other Old Testament 'prophecy' that can even remotely be linked to a future Messiah being born of a virgin. So from where did this concept originate?

It has been argued above that Mary had become infatuated with the faith of the Magi from the East through Joseph, and that she would most likely have escaped with them to the 'place in the

East,' as recorded in the Koran. Their faith was the religion known as Zoroastrianism, a religion that predates Christianity by several centuries.[40] Zoroaster, a Persian Magus, experienced what he perceived to be divine revelations and subsequently formed his own faith of only one eternal God called Ahura Mazda, who was wholly wise, good, and just but not all-powerful, and in his own words:

> Truly there are two primal spirits, twins renowned to be in conflict. In thought and word, in act they were two: the good and the bad.[41]

The adversary of God was known as Angra Mainyu (the Evil Spirit), likewise not created (eternal), and it was to overcome him and destroy evil that Ahura Mazda created in this world the future battleground for the final conflict.

From Boyce's summary we learn that Zoroastrianism essentially encompasses the following:

> The ultimate aim of all virtuous striving is to bring about the salvation of the world. According to Zoroaster's teachings, the combined efforts of all the righteous will gradually weaken evil and so bring about the triumph of the good, and this is the constant expectation of his followers. For various reasons, however, another strand of belief developed, that the last days will be marked by increasing wretchedness and cosmic calamities. Then, it is generally believed, the World Saviour, the Saosyhant, will come in glory. **He is to be born of the seed of the prophet, miraculously preserved within a lake, and a virgin mother. There will be a great battle between the yazatas and deavas, good people and bad, ending in victory for the good. The bodies of those who have died earlier will be resurrected and united with their souls, and the Last Judgement will take place through a fiery ordeal**: metals in the mountains will melt to form a burning torrent, which will destroy the wicked and purge hell. [By a later softening of this doctrine, first attested in the ninth century CE, the wicked, purified by the agony of this ordeal, will survive to join the blessed.] The saved will be given ambrosia to eat, and their bodies will become as immortal as their souls. The kingdom of Ahura Mazda will come on an earth made perfect again, and the blessed will rejoice everlastingly in his presence.

The parallels between the teachings of Zoroaster and those of Jesus Christ are unmistakable, and given the circumstances systematically outlined above, there can be little doubt that Christ based his teachings on what he had learned in the East. Zoroaster's belief in the existence of conflicting twins must certainly be based on the ancient legends about twin brothers who had become enemies, with the Egyptian mythological gods Osiris and Seth probably being the best example.[42]

In ancient times the Magi appear to have been highly respected, at least in their own country. It would have been appropriate for Mary to have named her son after Simon Maccabaeus, the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty,[43] and had Christ indeed grown up in Persia amongst the Magi, he more than likely would have aspired to have become a Magus himself, hence his name Simon Magus.

3.4 The Twelve Disciples, the Three Marys, Cleophas, Clopas, and Alphaeus

During his ministry Christ called twelve disciples to follow him and make up his inner circle.[44] These disciples are listed in table 3.1, with the brothers of Christ in bold text and key references to specific individuals found in texts other than the Gospels.

Apostle	Description	Remarks	Note
Simon (who is called Peter)	Also known as the son of Jonah and renamed Cephas by Christ Was from Bethsaida[45]	Brother of Andrew, whose mother was Joanna (Anna, wife of Joachim)	1
Andrew	Brother of Simon Peter	Mother was Joanna[46,47]	2
James	Son of Zebedee and together with his brother called *Boanerges* by Christ, interpreted as 'Sons of Thunder'';[48] Mother was Salome Generally referred to as James the Greater[49]	Son of 'The Wolf' (see 'The aliases Christ gave his disciples' below)	3
John	Son of Zebedee, brother of James Also known as John the Beloved[50]		4
Philip	Was from Bethsaida[51]	A brother of Mariamne II	5
Bartholomew	Also called Nathaneal[52,53]	Most likely bar (son of) Tholomy, who was a son of Sohemus,[54] who with Joseph guarded Mariamne	6
Thomas	Also called Didymus[55]	Judas Thomas, twin brother of Christ[56]	7

Apostle	Description	Remarks	Note
Matthew	Tax collector, also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus[57]	Also known as Zebedee, 'The Wolf' (see 'The aliases Christ gave his disciples' below)	8
James	Son of Alphaeus, referred to as James the Less (Little, Younger)	Mother was Mary;[58] Also called James the Just and most likely a brother of Christ[59-61].	9
Thaddaeus	Also called Judas, the brother of James.[62] Called Lebbaeus, surnamed Thaddaeus, in some manuscripts[63] and also Judas the Zealot in some Old Latin manuscripts[64]	Most likely the Judas who was named as one of the brothers of Christ. Was 'from the house of Joseph,'[65] which certainly must mean 'a son of Joseph'	
Simon, the Zealot	Simon the Canaanite (Young/Webster Translations)	Called Simon the son of Cleopas (Cleophas) 'who is the same as Nathaniel' in *The Genealogies of the Twelve Apostles*[66] Named as Judas the Galilean in *The Preaching of Saint Simon, the Son of Cleophas Surnamed Judas or Nathaniel*[67]	

Apostle	Description	Remarks	Note
		and Judas the Zealot ('Zelotes') in *The Epistle of the Apostles*[68]	
		Through Cleophas one of the four brothers of Christ	
Judas Iscariot	The traitor, son of Simon Iscariot[69]	Most likely a son of Simon Boethus (see section 7.1)	

Table 3.1. The twelve disciples of Christ

Notes to table 3.1

1. In section 9.1 it is shown that the name Jonah, the father of Peter, is an abbreviated form of Yonahkhir, which is translated to Joachim in English. Simon Peter can be identified with Simon bar Gioras, Gioras being the Latin equivalent of Joachim. According to Christian tradition, Joachim and Anna (from Joanna?) were the parents of Mary, the mother of Christ. It would seem that in an attempt to hide Mary's true lineage (she was the Hasmonean wife of Herod the Great), Simon Peter's parents were deliberately introduced as Mary's.
2. It is not clear how Orr, the 1939 editor of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (*ISBE*), arrived at this conclusion. Her name is not mentioned in 'The Genealogies of the Twelve Apostles,' as he seems to claim. However, as discussed in section 2.3, Luke refers to Joanna as the wife of Chuza (Joseph, Herod's treasurer and father of Christ), and Joseph had married a Mary (Marjam), the daughter of Hannah, which would have been Mariamne II, the daughter of Simon Boethus and his wife Hanna (Joanna?). Amidst this confusion it seems that

there was still another couple, Joachim and another Joanna, who had sons called Simon Peter and Andrew.
3. It is argued in section 9.2 that Zebedee, which means 'The Wolf,' was none other than Matthew, who was also called Levi, the tax collector and apostle of Christ. As a tax collector, he most likely would have been an elder son of Joseph, the father of Christ, and if so, he may have been married to Salome, the daughter of Herod and Elpis, due to the close ties between Joseph and Herod. That Joseph had a son called Matthias is confirmed by Josephus in his genealogy (see table 2.2).
4. In section 9.2 John is argued to be the same person as John, son of Levi, of Gischala.
5. With Phillip and the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew all linked to Bethsaida, there is a reasonable chance that they had known each other before Christ returned to Israel. Philip is recorded to have had a sister called Mariamne, who is mentioned along with a Martha, both in the context of preparing or serving bread (see section 3.3). This most likely refers to Mary Magdalene (Mariamne II), whose sister was called Martha, implying that Philip was a son of Simon Boethus (see section 7.1). The Boethus family is closely associated with Christ.
6. The generally accepted meaning of the name Bartholomew is 'son of Talmai,' from the Aramaic *bar Tôlmay*.[70] However, it seems more likely that the name can be derived from *bar Tholomew*, referring to the son of one Tholomew. Josephus mentions a Tholomy, the son of Sohemus, 'who dwelt at **Mount Libanus**, and almost all the cities.'
   Sohemus, with whom Joseph guarded Mariamne I, was from **Iturea,** which was known to be in the region of Mount Lebanon:

> About 23 BCE Iturea with the adjacent provinces fell into the hands of a chief named Zenodorus (Josephus, l. c. xv. 10, section 1; idem, B. J. i. 20, section 4). Three

> years later, at the death of Zenodorus, Augustus gave Iturea to Herod the Great, who in turn bequeathed it to his son Philip [Josephus, Ant. xv. 10, section 3]. That Iturea was in the region of Mount Lebanon is confirmed by an inscription of about the year 6 CE (Ephemeris Epigraphica, 1881, pp. 537–542), in which Q. Æmilius Secundus relates that he was sent by Quirinius against the Itureans in Mount Lebanon.[71]

In ancient times Mount Lebanon was called Mount Libanus.[72] It is therefore very likely that the **Sohemus of Mount Libanus was also the Sohemus of Iturea**. There was also an arch-robber called Tholomy, who was captured and killed by Fadus (ca. 44 CE), 'but not till he had done a world of mischief to Idumea and the Arabians.'[73]

Joseph would most likely have befriended Sohemus, considering that both were close to Herod. Joseph would also have known Tholomy, the son of Sohemus. When Christ, Joseph's son by Mariamne I, reappeared on the scene following the death of Herod, Joseph would no doubt have introduced him to Tholomy and his family. It then stands to reason that Christ could easily have attracted both Tholomy the robber (Christ himself had become an arch-robber—see chapter 9) and a young son of Tholomy, Nathaneal bar Tholomy, as followers.

7. Matthew records that Christ had four brothers:[74] **Judas, Joseph** (most likely Joseph bar Sabbas, called Justus, or Josephus—see section 2.3), **James, and Simon**. The disciple called Thomas, who is best known for doubting the initial reports of Christ's resurrection, is curiously referred to as Didymus,[75] presumably from the Greek word *didumos* meaning 'double, twin.'[76] In *The Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas*,[77] he is referred to as Judas Thomas, also called Didymus and later in the text is specifically identified as the twin brother of Christ ('And he

saw the Lord Jesus talking with the bride, and having the appearance of Judas Thomas…And the Lord said to him: I am not Judas, who also is Thomas; I am his brother.') Thomas is nowhere listed as a brother of Christ, and he must therefore have been known as Judas, who was called Thomas Didymus. The name Thomas is generally assumed to be a derivation of the Hebrew word *tâ'ôm*,[78] which means 'twin,' and Thomas Didymus would therefore mean '(the) Twin Twin.'

A more likely interpretation of the name Thomas can be derived from the Greek words *thauma*[79] and *thaumazo*,[80] both meaning 'wonder, admiration, a wonder' or 'to gaze in wonder.' If the story of Thomas's refusal to believe that Christ had risen from the grave is true, one can imagine how he would have stared at Christ and his wounds in disbelief, or 'gazing in wonder.' The second part of his name, Didymus, can also have a different interpretation. The Latin verb *dido didere dididi diditum*[81] means 'to divide, distribute, or spread round.' This interpretation can potentially be linked to the acts of terrorism committed by the followers of Christ when they attacked cities. As discussed in sections 9.2 and 9.4, the houses of the rich were searched for their beautiful daughters and young wives, who were then taken from the city and given as reward to Christ's disciples and followers. Judas Thomas Didymus may have had the authority to decide which of them would get which of the abducted women first; in other words, he would be the distributor of the young women amongst the men.

With Thomas having been identified as Judas, a brother of Christ who had grown up in Israel, while Christ grew up in the East, **the possibility that Christ had an identical twin is eliminated** (Mary would have taken Christ's twin brother along to the East). It is, however, possible that the features and build of their father Joseph were particularly discernible in Judas and Christ.

A curious reference to Christ in the Talmud reads:

> Rabbi Meir used to say, What is the meaning of, **For a curse of God is he that is hung**? [It is like the case of] **two brothers, who resembled each other**. One ruled over the whole world, the other took to robbery. **After a time the one who took to robbery was caught, and they crucified him on a cross**. And everyone who passed to and fro said, It seems that the king is crucified. Therefore it is said, **A curse of God is he that is hung**.[82]

As discussed in chapter 9, Christ and his disciples took to robbery when he was rejected as king by the Jews. Both Christ and his similar-looking brother, Judas Thomas, were actively involved in these events, hence the Talmudic reference.

8. The identity of Alphaeus remains somewhat of a mystery, as summarised in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

> The second, Clopas, is mentioned in John 19:25, where a Mary is called *Maria he tou Klopa*, which is generally translated by 'Mary the wife of Clopas.' This name, Clopas, is thought by many to be the Greek transliteration of an Aramaic Alphaeus. This view is based on the identification of Mary, the mother of James etc. (Mark 15:40) with Mary, the wife of Clopas, and the consequent identity of Alphaeus, father of James (Mark 3:18), with Clopas. Etymologically, however, the identification of the two names offers serious difficulties:...
>
> ...Even if, etymologically, the two names are different...the question of the identity of Alphaeus and Clopas is still open. If the two persons are distinct, then we know nothing of Clopas beyond the fact

> recorded in St. John; if, on the contrary, they are identified, Clopas' personality is or may be closely connected with the history of the brethren of the Lord and of James the Less.[83]

Papias,[84] one of the early church leaders, is believed to have been a contemporary of John the Evangelist. Of his works only fragments remained, one of which reads:

> (1.) Mary the mother of the Lord; (2.) Mary the wife of **Cleophas or Alphæus**, who was the mother of **James the bishop and apostle, and of Simon and Thaddeus, and of one Joseph**; (3.) Mary Salome, wife of Zebedee, mother of John the evangelist and James; (4.) Mary Magdalene. These four are found in the Gospel. James and Judas and Joseph were sons of an aunt (2) of the Lord's. James also and John were sons of another aunt (3) of the Lord's. Mary (2), mother of James the Less and Joseph, wife of Alphæus was the sister of Mary the mother of the Lord, whom John names of Cleophas, either from her father or from the family of the clan, or for some other reason. Mary Salome (3) is called Salome either from her husband or her village. Some affirm that she is the same as Mary of Cleophas, because she had two husbands.[85]

The second Mary was the mother of James, Simon, Thaddeus (Judas), and Joseph; in other words, she was the mother of the brothers of Jesus. As mentioned before, this Mary would have been Mariamne II, by whom Joseph had fathered these four sons, unless James had actually been born to Joseph's first wife, as discussed earlier (more likely). This reference to the brothers of Christ links Cleophas and Alphaeus directly to Joseph, the father of Christ.

According to *The Lives of Saints Simon and Jude* in the *Golden Legend*:

> Simon Cananean and Judas Thaddeus were brethren of James the Less and sons of Mary Cleophas, which was married to Alpheus,[86]

again suggesting that the names Cleophas and Alphaeus can be linked to the same person.

It would therefore seem that Cleophas and Alphaeus were indeed one and the same person. If so, Matthew and James (through Alphaeus), Simon (through Cleophas) and Thaddeus (also called Judas, and brother of James, son of Alphaeus) and Joseph, surnamed Justus (through the Papias fragment), would all have been brothers. Excluding Matthew, these match the names of the brothers of Christ as related earlier. From table 2.2 and the subsequent discussion, it would appear that Josephus's father was Joseph, and the Matthias he named as his father was an older son of Joseph. Matthew, the son of Alphaeus, would then be the same as Matthias, the son of Joseph, who became a father figure to Josephus.

Possibly the clearest identification of Cleopas (Cleophas) as Joseph, the father of Christ, can be found in the interpretation of the name Cleopas. It is generally believed to mean 'son of a renowned father,' from Cleo(s)patros, a combination of the Greek words *kleos*[87] (renown, glory) and *pater*[88] (father). A significantly better translation from a phonetic equivalent perspective is rendered by the Greek words *kleio*[89] (to close or to shut up) and *pais*[90] (a boy or son), rendering (He of) the shut-up son. This would be the Greek rendition of the Hebrew *ben Ulam* or 'concealed son' as discussed in section 2.2, although it could also refer to Mariamne, who became pregnant and was supposed to be 'shut up' by Joseph and Sohemus.

Incidentally, the mythological god Alpheus,[91] whose name is almost identical to Alphaeus, was infamous for his pursuit of the nymph Arethusa, and it may very well be that Joseph, the father of Christ, earned himself this nickname for his pursuit of the beautiful women in Herod's court.

9. If this James was indeed one of the known brothers of Christ as concluded in the previous note, then the Mary who was named as his mother would no doubt have referred to Mary, the mother of Christ (see 'The Three Marys' below). According to *The Martyrdom of Saint James the Just*,[92] James was the youngest of the four sons of Joseph the Carpenter. This must, however, be a distorted version of the facts since Joseph had fathered at least one more son, Joseph, called Justus (Josephus), with Mariamne II (Mary Magdalene). James also had two sisters, and he was already a young boy when Mary became the 'bride' of Joseph, if this legend happens to be true. Mary (Mariamne I) tended the young James, which confirms that Mary was in the house of Joseph for some time and was not the first wife of Joseph. The authors of the Gospels and the apocryphal legends about Christ would of course never have admitted, if they knew at all, that Joseph and Mary had never married but only had a brief affair. They must also have been confused by the multitude of Marys. For all we know, Joseph's first wife may also have been a Mary.

The Three Marys

All four Gospels relate that Christ's crucifixion was witnessed by women who had become his followers. Amongst them, Matthew includes Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee;[93] Mark mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary who was the mother of James the younger, Joseph, and Salome;[94] Luke simply refers to women from Galilee being present without naming them;[95] and John mentions three, namely: Mary who was the

mother of Christ, Mary who was the sister of the mother of Christ and wife of Clopas (Cleophas), and Mary Magdalene.[96]

Papias interprets these names as representing four women (see note 8 above), but *The Gospel of Philip* states that three women always accompanied the Lord:

> **There were three who always walked with the Lord**: Mary, his mother, and her sister, and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary.[97]

In context the latter sentence seems to refer to the names of the women just mentioned (echoing John's account), but the statement that Christ (or his mother?) had a sister called Mary suggests that Papias's statement is correct, there being four women called Mary closely associated with Christ. According to Mark, Christ did have sisters,[98] and it is certainly possible that one of them was called Mary. It is later argued that the name Paul was a pseudonym adopted by Christ following his staged execution, and according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul had a sister whose son warned him that the Jews were planning to kill him following his arrest at the temple.[99] In other words, we have three independent accounts suggesting that Christ had at least one sister, and that she was probably called Mary.

The Secret Gospel of Mark[100] repeats the women named by Mark as (my comments in brackets):

> And the sister [Mary Magdalene] of the youth whom Jesus loved [Lazarus[101]] and his mother [presumably Christ's and not the mother of Lazarus] and Salome were there,

From the accounts of Matthew and Mark, we can conclude that Salome was the mother of John and James, the sons of Zebedee. Comparing

these three names to those given by Matthew, Luke, and *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, we can conclude that Mary, the mother of James and Joses, must be Mary, the mother of Jesus. As related earlier, Christ is known to have had half-brothers called James, Joseph (Joses), Simon, and Judas. It is very likely that the authors of the Gospels had assumed that Christ was related to his brothers through his mother Mary and father Joseph.

As suggested earlier, Joseph (Cleopas) must have married Mariamne II after her divorce from Herod, in which case she may have been the actual mother of at least some of the brothers of Christ. This fact would have been kept secret from the later disciples of Christ. Papias records that Mary of Cleopas had two husbands, which would be correct if Joseph had married Mariamne II following her divorce from Herod. Finally, it is implied that Mary, the mother of John and James, the sons of Zebedee, is Salome (she is often referred to as Mary Salome, see Papias's account above). She may have been an unknown sister of Mariamne I (unlikely) but was definitely not a wife of Cleophas. This mistaken association may be due to her husband, Zebedee, being Matthew, the son of Joseph (Cleophas), which would have made her a daughter-in-law of Cleophas. She would also have been a 'sister' of Christ, as both of them had the same father (or father-in-law), Joseph. To summarise, the three prominent Marys in Christ's life were Mary, his mother (Mariamne I); Mary Magdalene (Mariamne II); and Mary Salome, the wife of Zebedee (who was Matthias alias Matthew) and daughter-in-law of Joseph, the father of Christ.

The Calling of the Disciples

The authors of the Gospels went to great lengths to create the impression that the disciples of Christ were called at random and that they dropped whatever they were involved in to become his followers. The calling of only seven of the twelve disciples is described in the New Testament (see table 3.2).

Disciple	Description of the Calling
Simon Peter and Andrew	As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him.[102] Luke[103] includes a miraculous fish catch. John claims that Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, overheard him calling Christ 'the Lamb of God' and immediately deserted John to follow Christ and convinced his brother Simon Peter to do the same.[104]
James and John	Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.[105] Luke has John and James witnessing the miraculous fish catch.[106]
Matthew, called Levi	As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.[107] Luke states that, 'Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.'[108]
Philip and Nathanael (Bartholomew)	The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael[109] (Nathanael decided to follow Christ who supposedly knew that Nathanael was standing under a fig tree before he was called by Philip—another miracle).

Table 3.2. The 'spontaneous' calling of disciples

From the preceding discussion (see table 3.1) we know that Matthew, James (the Less), Thaddeus (Judas), and Simon the Zealot (Simon bar Cleophas) were half-brothers of Christ, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Matthew), were therefore also related to him. It is also clear that Mary and Christ deliberately introduced Joachim and Anna (Joanna), the parents of Simon and Andrew, as her (Mary's) parents, obviously to avoid any connection with her past and her link to Herod the Great.

Matthew as Zebedee was the brother-in-law of Andrew (see section 7.4), implying that both Simon Peter and Andrew had close links to Christ. Philip and Nathanael (Bartholomew) were probably close friends of the brothers Simon and Andrew. Bartholomew was the grandson of Sohemus, the close friend of Joseph, Herod's treasurer. Judas Iscariot appears to have been a later son of Simon Boethus, who was the father of Mariamne II (Mary Magdalene), Martha, and Lazarus (Eleazar), as discussed in section 7.1. Thomas, too, may have been a half-brother of Christ and possibly a brother of Matthew by Joseph's first wife. This implies that seven of the twelve disciples would have been blood relatives of Christ, with an additional two as in-laws—all in all, a family affair.

The Aliases Christ Gave His Disciples

Simon Peter

Of all the apostles who were given alternative names by Christ, the best example must certainly be Simon Peter, whom Christ also called Cephas[110] and Simon bar Jonah:

> Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah,…And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.[111]

The Greek word for Peter is *petros*,[112] and *petra*[113] means 'a mass of rock.' It is, however, rather odd that Christ would have given Simon a Greek nickname, as both he and Simon were Jews. The Hebrew word *peter*, *pitrâh*[114] means 'a fissure' or 'openeth,' from *pâtar*,[115] 'to cleave or burst through.' The Greek word for Cephas is *Kēphas*[116] and is interpreted as 'the rock,' but this appears to be a Hellenised version of the Hebrew word *kêph*,[117] 'a hollow rock or rock.' Several other Hebrew words, however, also qualify as the root form of Cephas, namely *châphas*,[118] 'to seek, to conceal oneself, to search'; *chêphes*,[119] 'something covert, i.e., a trick, search'; and even *sâphaph*,[120] 'to snatch away, to terminate, to be a doorkeeper.' The pronunciation of the latter is different from the others as it starts with an *s* and not a *k*, which may or may not rule it out as a possible root of *Cephas* (see also section 9.1).

Zebedee

The name Zebedee is a combination of the Hebrew words *Zᵉ'eb*,[121] pronounced *zeh-abe*,' meaning 'wolf,' and *diy*,[122] pronounced *dee* and meaning 'that.' The name *Zebedee* therefore means 'That wolf' or '**The** wolf,' so as to set him apart from other 'wolves.' The link to Matthew, who was also called Levi, is given by John *bar Levi* of Gischala, who is identified as John the Beloved (a son of Zebedee) in section 9.2. Levi (Matthew) would most likely have been an older half-brother of Christ, by Joseph's first wife (Joseph was a widower). It would seem that he acted as a father figure to Josephus (see table 2.2 and subsequent discussion).

Boanerges

Christ named James and John the Beloved, the sons of Zebedee, *Boanerges*, which is explained as 'Sons of Thunder.' The name is typically interpreted as the Greek equivalent[123] of the Hebrew words *ben*,[124] meaning 'a son,' and either *rᵉgaz*,[125] 'a violent anger or rage,' or *rôgez*,[126] 'a commotion, a crash of thunder or anger.' This interpretation, however, seems to be forced. Given the context of James and John being

the sons of 'The wolf,' it is probably too much of a coincidence that the Greek word *boao*[127] means 'to halloo or to shout in a tumultuous way.' In the sense of urging on hounds in a hunt, it would mean 'to excite a pack (of wolves?).'

There does not appear to be either a Hebrew or a Greek equivalent of the word *Nerges*, but, strangely, it can be translated without difficulty from the Sumerian language as a combination of *Nir/Ner*,[128] meaning 'Lord' or 'offspring,' and *gis/ges*,[129] meaning 'penis,' rendering 'Lord (of the) Penis' (it should be noted that the word *gis* is usually used in connection with something made of wood). Boao-Nerges would then mean '**Hallooer of the Lord of the Penis**' (Jesus Christ).

As ridiculous as this may seem at first, this name alludes not only to the sexual activities of Christ (see section 8.3) but also to the violent nature of the followers of Christ (see chapter 9). Christ was brought up in the East in the religion of the Magi and no doubt could speak Sumerian. As stated before, the Sumerian language was the language of ancient Sumer (present-day Iraq and surrounding areas[130]) and was replaced by Akkadian as a spoken language at the beginning of the second millennium BCE but continued to be used for cultural purposes until the first century CE. It is therefore possible that Christ, who grew up in the East, was familiar with the Sumerian language and sometimes used derogatory names for either himself or his followers, who were none the wiser.

Thaddeus

Given the fact that Christ gave names such as those listed above to his disciples, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the names Thaddeus and Lebbaeus had likewise been given to Judas, who was also known as Judas the Galilean. The question then remains how the name should be interpreted.

Strong's Greek Dictionary lists *Thaddaios*[131] and *Lebbaios*[132] as of uncertain origin. A popular interpretation of Thaddeus appears to be 'Gift of God,'[133] possibly from *thēōs*,[134] 'a deity, God,' and *dōsis*,[135] 'a gift.'

The name Lebbaeus is usually assumed to be related to the Hebrew word *lêb*[136] (heart), an interpretation that is echoed in *The Lives of Saints Simon and Jude*:

> He is said also in the History Ecclesiastic, Lebbæus, which is as much to say as heart, or worshipper of heart. Or he is said Lebbæus of lebes, that is a vessel of heart by great hardiness.

However, in the context of the violence perpetrated of the disciples of Christ, a different set of interpretations emerges. The Hebrew word *lᵉbîyâ/lᵉbâ'ôth*[137] means 'lion,' which suggests that Christ nicknamed Judas the Galilean the Lion in the same manner he named Matthew the Wolf.

There is more than one possible Hebrew interpretation for the name Thaddeus. The name could be based on the Aramaic word *tadda*,[138] which means 'breast,' or the word *tôwdâh*,[139] which means 'thanksgiving' or 'praise.' It seems that Christ gave some of his disciples Hebrew nicknames that describe predators. In line with this, the words *'âthad*,[140] meaning 'prepare,' *dâ'âh*,[141] meaning 'vulture,' and *'uwsh*,[142] meaning 'assemble yourselves,' could potentially be combined to yield 'get the vultures ready to assemble.' It may have been Thaddeus's duty to call the men together before an attack on a city.

In summary, a family tree of the family of Jesus Christ as based on the preceding discussions is shown in figure 3.2. The names of his family members who became his disciples, later called his apostles, are shown in italics.

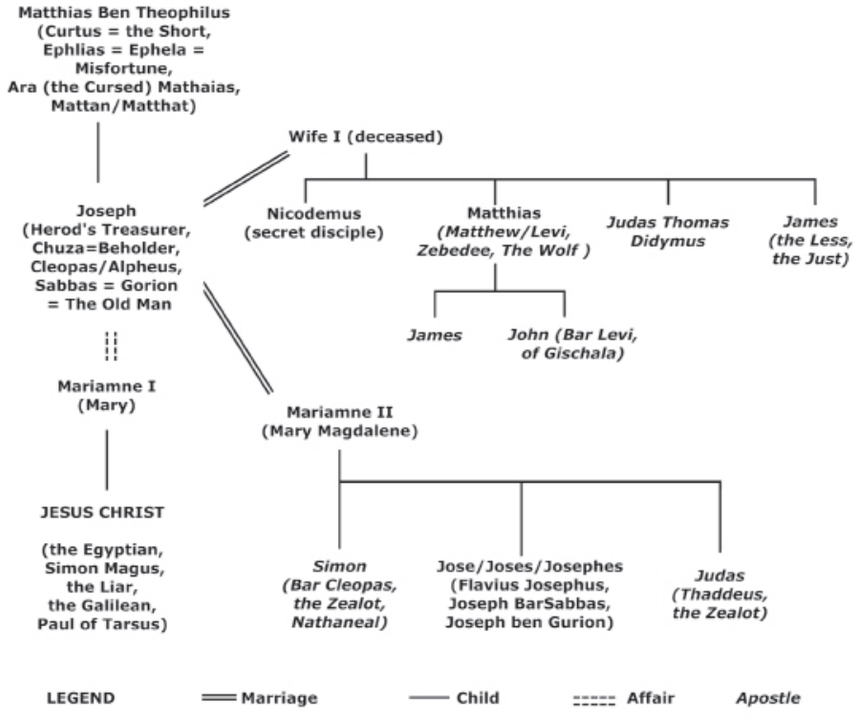

Figure 3.2. Proposed family tree of Jesus Christ

4

Dating the Birth and Crucifixion of Christ

> You are not yet fifty years old.
>
> —John 8:57

> The thirty-sixth year after the Passion of our Lord, second year of Nero, Saint Paul was sent to Rome bound.
>
> —*The Life of Saint Paul the Apostle*

Crucial to the arguments above is the dating of the life of Christ, which would include his birth and crucifixion and possibly any datable events in between. In the Bible and apocryphal texts, there are only a few, often disputed, time markers. Christian tradition relates that Christ was born while Herod was still alive, which allows for a year of birth around 4 BCE, the generally assumed year of Herod's death.[1,2] The early church father Irenaeus remarks that Christ was born in the forty-first year of the reign of Augustus.[3] Augustus was born in 63 BCE and ruled from 27 BCE until his death forty-one years later in 14 CE.[4] However, Christ was most definitely not born in the year 14 CE, year forty-one of the reign of Augustus. It has, however, been recognised that Irenaeus and several others must have interpreted the beginning of the reign of Augustus as the year 43 BCE.[5] Augustus, then still known as Octavian, took over command of the *fasces*, the 'symbols of command,' for the first time in January of 43 BCE[6] and from there on continued to grow in power. In November of 43 BCE, Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus formed a junta called the Second Triumvirate, and this date appears to have been regarded by the early church leaders as the beginning of his reign (forty-one years later would be 2 BCE). He became sole ruler in January of 27 BCE.[7]

In his *An Answer to the Jews*, Tertullian explains the date of the birth of Christ as follows:

> Cleopatra,…*xx* years *v* months.
> Yet again Cleopatra reigned jointly with Augustus…*xiii* years.
> After Cleopatra, Augustus reigned other…*xliii* years.
> For all the years of the empire of Augustus were…*lvi* years.
>
> Let us see, moreover, how in the forty-first year of the empire of Augustus, **when he has been reigning for *xx* and *viii* years after the death of Cleopatra, the Christ is born**. (And the same Augustus survived, after Christ is born, *xv* years; and the remaining times of years to the day of the birth of Christ will bring us to the *xl* first year, which is the *xx* and *viii*th of Augustus after the death of Cleopatra.)[8]

Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide in 30 BCE,[9] and twenty-eight years later would date the birth of Christ to 2 BCE. It is clear that many of the early church leaders used this reasoning to derive this year as the year of the birth of Christ, but in terms of the hypothesis presented above, that Christ was born around 29 BCE, the year 2 BCE would rather represent the year Christ returned to Israel and not the year of his death.

According to Luke, Christ's ministry began at the age of thirty[10] and lasted up to three years, as John mentions three distinct Passover festivals.[11] By contrast, the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) mention only one Passover festival and thereby seem to imply that Christ had taught for only one year.[12] Most scholars, therefore, place the date of crucifixion between the years 29 CE (4 BCE plus 33 years) and 36 CE, this being the last year of office of Pontius Pilate (26–36 CE),[13] before whom Christ was brought during his trial.[14]

There are, however, other indicators that suggest earlier dates of both Christ's birth and crucifixion.

4.1 The Birth of Christ during the Census of Augustus

Luke relates that Christ was born during the time of a census of the entire Roman Empire ordered by Augustus.[15] He clarifies this census as being the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. Augustus is known to have taken a census of Roman citizens at least three times—in 28 BCE, 8 BCE, and 14 CE[16]—while Quirinius served as imperial legate of Syria from 6 to 9 CE and conducted the census at the beginning of his term of office.[17] A clear discrepancy therefore exists between the censuses of Augustus and Luke's claim that the census happened during the rule of Quirinius. Despite lengthy scholarly attempts to rationalise these contradicting accounts, no agreement seems to have been reached.[18,19] However, the first census of Augustus, conducted in 28 BCE, would be a perfect match to the sentencing and execution of Mariamne I, who must have given birth to Christ in either 29 or 28 BCE.

However, in the apocryphal text known as *The Syriac Infancy Gospel*, also called *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour*, we read the following:

> We find what follows in the book of **Joseph the high priest**, who lived in the time of Christ. Some say that he is Caiaphas..…
>
> …In the three hundred and ninth year of the era of Alexander, Augustus put forth an edict, that every man should be enrolled in his native place. Joseph therefore arose, and taking Mary his spouse, went away to Jerusalem, and came to Bethlehem, to be enrolled along with his family in his native city. And having come to a cave, Mary told Joseph that the time of the birth was at

> hand, and that she could not go into the city; but, said she, let us go into this cave.[20,21]

This date is also recorded in *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*:

> **It came to pass in the 309th year of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian**, in the reign of **Tiberius Caesar**, in the government of Herod the ruler of the Jews, that the angel Gabriel, the chief of the angels, by the command of God went down to Nazareth, to a virgin called **Mariam** of the tribe of Judah…and he appeared to her and said, 'Lo ! there ariseth from thee the One that spake with our fathers, and he shall be a Saviour to Israel'…Then **Mariam** was perturbed at this word, and was exceedingly terrified, [22]

and in which Harris, its translator, states that Dionysius bar Salibi likewise recorded that:

> Jacob of Edessa, whom we follow, says that our Lord was born in the 309th year of the Greeks.

The Alexandrian age began in the year 336 BCE,[23] which means that **Christ was born around 27 BCE**. It is possible that the 'era of Alexander' was later changed to 'year of the Greeks' to match the generally accepted date of the birth of Christ. The year of the Greeks, properly named the Seleucid era or *Anno Graecorum*,[24] began in 312 BCE, and 309 years later would imply that Christ was born in 3 BCE. The first version confirms that Christ was born around the time of the first census decreed by Augustus. It has already been shown that Joseph of Ellemus had served as high priest for one day, this Joseph very likely being the biblical Joseph, father of Christ. Joseph Caiaphas served as high priest from 18 to 37 CE,[25] but the text may actually link

Joseph, the high priest, to Joseph, the father of Christ, as Caiaphas was not a follower of Christ and would not have written a document in such a benign manner. The reference to the reign of Tiberius is clearly in error, as Tiberius ruled from 14 to 37 CE.[26] It is possible that Tiberius is here confused with his stepfather Augustus, who conducted his first census in 28 BCE.

4.2 The Crucifixion

As stated, the date of the crucifixion of Christ is generally assumed to be in the range of 26 to 36 CE. Pontius Pilate played a key role in the trial of Christ and is infamous for washing his hands to symbolise his innocence in the matter of the Crucifixion of Christ.[27] The general consensus appears to be that he was procurator (governor, prefect) of Judea during the period 26 to 36 CE.[28] The date of the beginning of Pilate's tenure as procurator, however, seems to be uncertain, as Josephus claims that the expulsion of Jews from Rome occurred when Pilate had already been in office, during the reign of Tiberius.[29] The historians Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius agree with Josephus that Tiberius expelled the Jews from Rome but place the event in 19 CE.[30] This would imply that Pilate must have been in office from as early as 19 CE, and that Christ's crucifixion could have occurred any time from 19 CE onwards.

Tiberius reigned from 14 to 37 CE, and according to Eusebius, the 'forgery' called *The Acts of Pilate* claims that Christ died 'in the fourth consulship of Tiberius, which was the seventh year of his reign.'[31] This description translates to **the year 21 CE**.

In *The History of the Death of Saint John the Evangelist*,[32] it is claimed that John lived seventy years after the resurrection of Christ, **until the reign of Domitian** (81–96 CE),[33] and 'he became an exceedingly old man.' This implies that the Crucifixion and resurrection occurred somewhere between 11 and 26 CE, accepting that John had died exactly seventy years after the Crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Had Christ been crucified in 33 CE as is generally assumed, John

would have died in the year 103 CE, seven years after the death of Domitian.

According to *The Life of Saint John the Evangelist*,[34] John was brought back from exile **after the death of Domitian,** and this text gives the period he lived following the Crucifixion of Christ as sixty-eight years:

> And finally after that he had founded many churches and had ordained bishops and priests in them, and confirmed them by his predication in the Christian faith, the year sixty-eight after the resurrection of Jesu Christ, for he was thirty-one years old when our Lord was crucified, and lived after sixty-eight years, and thus was all his age ninety-nine years.

This account seems to contradict the preceding account, which implies that John died during the reign of Domitian. It all depends, therefore, whether John was released during or after the reign of Domitian. Had Christ been crucified in 21 CE when John was thirty-one years old, he would have died (or have been released) sixty-eight years later, in the year 89 CE.

Another detailed dating of the Crucifixion is to be found in *The Life of Saint Paul the Apostle*:

> Jeronimus in his book, *De viris illustribus*, **that the thirty-sixth year after the Passion of our Lord, second year of Nero**, Saint Paul was sent to Rome bound[35]

Nero ruled from 54 to 68 CE,[36] and two years into his reign would be 56 CE. The year of the Crucifixion is then 56 CE − 36 = **20 CE**, which, allowing for rounding errors, is nearly identical to the year 21 CE as suggested by *The Acts of Pilate*. According to Pseudo-Chrysostom, Paul died at the age of sixty-eight, '**after having served the Lord for thirty-five years**.'[37] Paul was converted the same year Christ suffered his passion,[38,39] which incidentally is not surprising, as 'Paul' was in fact the new identity Christ assumed after his crucifixion. If Christ was indeed crucified around 21 CE, thirty-five years later would be **21 CE** + 35 = 56 CE, confirming the time Paul was reportedly taken to Rome to be executed. Christ would have been about eighty-four years old (from 28 BCE to 56 CE) when he was taken to Rome. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was sent to Rome shortly after the arrival of Festus.[40] The date when the reign of Festus began is traditionally placed around 60 to 61 CE, but others have argued that it may have occurred four to five years earlier,[41] or even 52/53 CE.[42] Eusebius places the arrival of Festus in the **second year of Nero,**[43] and Festus sent Paul to Rome within a couple of days from arriving in Judea, suggesting that Jeronimus's dating must be correct.

How long Paul was kept alive in Rome cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, since much of his journey to and stay in Rome as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles must be invention. According to Jeronimus, Paul was 'in free keeping' for two years following his arrest, after which Nero let him go free to preach the Gospel of Christ. He was beheaded in the fourteenth year of Nero, on 'the same year and day that Peter was crucified.' Given Christ's crimes and reputation, he would never have been set free. He would most likely have been executed within a year or two of arriving in Rome, which would have made him eighty-six or eighty-seven years old when he was executed. It would seem that the Jews remembered very well when Paul was deported to Rome but from then on could only speculate when he was executed.

It should be noted that other sources also state that the martyrdom of Paul took place towards the end of the reign of Nero, in the twelfth (Saint Epiphanius) year, the thirteenth (Euthalius) year, or the fourteenth (Saint Jerome) year—that is, between 66 and 68 CE.[44] Paul would then have been between ninety-five and ninety-seven

years old. Incidentally, Epiphanius records that James, the brother of Christ, was martyred at the age of ninety-six.[45] Paul (Christ) and his siblings, therefore, seem to have inherited their father's fabled longevity. Incidentally, Epiphanius's record of the death of James confirms that James was still a young child when Christ was born ca. 28 BCE. Epiphanius's full account reads:

> But James brother of the Lord and son of Joseph, died in Jerusalem, **having lived twenty-four years, more or less, after the Savior's Ascension**. **He was ninety-six years old** when he was struck on the head by a fuller with his club, flung from the pinnacle of the temple and cast down, he who had done no wrong.

Josephus records that James was stoned to death by order of the Jewish high priest Ananus in 62 CE.[46,47] If James was indeed ninety-six years old when he died, he would have been born in the year 62 CE − 96 years = 34 BCE. In the apocryphal *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* (discussed in section 2.2), it is recorded that Mary 'met' James in the house of Joseph and brought him up, and as a consequence she became known as his mother. James would have been about five years old when Joseph was instructed to guard Mary and about six years old when Christ was born in 28 BCE. The statement that James lived twenty-four years after the Crucifixion of Christ translates to a crucifixion date of 62 CE − 24 years = 38 CE, which is relatively close to the traditional date (33–36 CE) but far from the date proposed in this treatise (20/21 CE). However, if Epiphanius had made a simple error in recording '24' instead of '42,' for whatever reason, the actual date becomes 62 CE − 42 years = 20 CE, which is a perfect match with the proposed date. A more logical explanation would be that Epiphanius merely calculated the time span of '24 years, more or less' from the time of Ananus, as accurately as he knew it, to the generally assumed time of execution of Christ.

In *The Acts of Philip*,[48] the high priest Ananias accuses Christ's disciples as having stolen the body of the crucified Christ and from then on deceiving the whole world. He swears that he will capture Philip and take him to King Archelaus, who 'seeketh to kill him.' Archelaus ruled briefly during 4–6 CE,[49] which suggests either that the author of this document had simply made an error about who had been king at the time Ananias was high priest (ca. 47–58 CE, during the reign of Herod Agrippa II[50]), or more likely that it was known that Archelaus wanted to kill Christ the moment he learned that someone had returned to Israel with a seemingly legitimate claim to the throne.

4.3 Christ's Age at His Crucifixion

If Christ had indeed been born in the year 29 or 28 BCE and was crucified in the year 20 or 21 CE, he would have been in his late forties at the time of the Crucifixion. That he was of that age is suggested by a passage from the Gospel of John in which the Jews indignantly reproach Christ that he had not yet reached the age of fifty.[51] Irenaeus asserts that Christ taught until he was forty or fifty years old, as apparently attested by John himself. The actual text from Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* reads:

> Being thirty years old when He came to be baptized, **and then possessing the full age of a Master**,…Being a Master, therefore, **He also possessed the age of a Master**…So likewise **He was an old man for old men**, that He might be a perfect Master for all…They, however, that they may establish their false opinion regarding that which is written, 'to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,' maintain that He preached for one year only, and then suffered in the twelfth month. [In speaking thus,] **they are forgetful to their own disadvantage, destroying His whole work, and robbing Him of that age which is both more necessary and more honourable than any other**; that more advanced

age, I mean, during which also as a teacher He excelled all others. For how could He have had disciples, if He did not teach? And how could He have taught, unless He had reached the age of a Master? For when He came to be baptized, He had not yet completed His thirtieth year, but was beginning to be about thirty years of age (for thus Luke, who has mentioned His years, has expressed it: 'Now Jesus was, as it were, beginning to be thirty years old,' when He came to receive baptism); and, [according to these men,] He preached only one year reckoning from His baptism. On completing His thirtieth year He suffered, being in fact still a young man, and who had by no means attained to advanced age. Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, everyone will admit; but **from the fortieth and fiftieth year** a man begins to decline towards old age, **which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord**, [affirming] that **John conveyed to them that information**. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. **Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them**, and bear testimony as to the [validity of] the statement.

…But, besides this, those very Jews who then disputed with the Lord Jesus Christ have most clearly indicated the same thing. For when the Lord said to them, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad,' they answered Him, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?' **Now, such language is fittingly applied to one who has already passed the age of forty, without having as yet reached his fiftieth year, yet is not far from this latter period**. [52]

John furthermore narrates that during the episode of Christ's cleansing of the temple, the Jews demanded of him to see a miracle, to which he replied, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'[53] The Jews respond, '**It has taken forty-six years to build up this temple**…' to which John remarks that the temple Christ was speaking of **was his body**.

Herod began the construction of his temple ca. 20 BCE,[54] but it was only completed around the time when Joshua ben Gamaliel was deprived of the priesthood in 64 CE,[55,56] shortly before its destruction during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 CE.[57] It therefore took about eighty-four years to complete.

There are essentially two ways of interpreting the response by the Jews:

- They made this statement forty-six years after construction had begun, in the year 26 CE. This would be consistent with the conventional dating of the birth of Christ in 4 BCE and him beginning his ministry at the age of thirty, which would be that year. The statement by the Jews, however, suggests that the temple had been completed, which was not the case in 26 CE or as late as 33 CE.
- Had Christ been crucified around 21 CE as argued above, he would have been between forty-eight and forty-nine years old at that time, and the temple would have been under construction for only forty-one years. This would suggest that the Jews understood very well that Christ was referring to his own death and resurrection, and he was forty-six years old when that conversation had taken place. The Crucifixion must have taken place about three years later.

As discussed, there are several indicators that suggest that the Crucifixion of Christ happened around the year 21 CE and that he was in his late forties at the time. The argument in favour of a later date, ca. 29 to 36 CE, originated purely from the assumption that Christ was born during the final years of Herod the Great and that

he had begun his ministry in Israel thirty years later. If Christ had indeed been born in 29 or 28 BCE as argued above, he would have been about thirty years old when he returned to Israel following the death of Herod. His return to Israel and not his birth would then have heralded the beginning of the Christian era.

4.4 Probable Reasons for the Crucifixion

According to the Gospels, Christ went to a place called Gethsemane (or according to Luke, the Mount of Olives) immediately before his arrest, where he became deeply distressed and troubled ('my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'), falling to the ground and praying 'My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will,' his sweat being like drops of blood falling to the ground.[58] He rose and told the others to awake as 'his hour had arrived,' upon which Judas Iscariot, his betrayer, showed up with soldiers to arrest him.

In reality, there is no such thing as a premonition of a future event, and Christ must have known exactly where and when he would be arrested, or, in other words, it was arranged. It is also highly suspicious that, according to *The Gospel of Peter*, Joseph of Arimathea was not only a disciple of Christ but also a friend of Pilate:

> And there was standing there Joseph the friend of Pilate and of the Lord; and, knowing that they were about to crucify him, he came to Pilate and asked the body of the Lord for burial.[59]

This particular remark suggests that the arrangements for the burial of Christ were made even before he was crucified. This is contrary to the impression created in the Gospels that Joseph asked Pilate for Christ's body after he had died.[60] Pilate allowed Joseph to remove Christ's body, and Joseph and Nicodemus then prepared the body and buried it in a tomb in Joseph's garden, which he had prepared for

himself. Furthermore, it is stated in the Talmud that Christ was 'connected to the government':

> And a herald precedes him, etc. This implies, only immediately before [the execution], but not previous thereto. [In contradiction to this] it was taught: On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. **For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried**, He is going forth to be stoned **because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy**. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf. But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover! Ulla retorted: Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defence could be made? Was he not a Mesith [enticer], concerning whom Scripture says, Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him? **With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government [or royalty, i.e., influential]**.[61]

The explanation offered in the text as to why Christ was known to have been 'connected to the government' downplays the significance of the statement. It seems that the explanation labelling Christ merely as 'influential' must have been a later addition by translators or editors who could not imagine that Christ actually had connections to the government (the royal household). Mariamne was a former queen of this household, and Joseph was its (former) treasurer and manager.

Incidentally, the statement that Christ's crucifixion had been announced forty days in advance seems to be too much of a coincidence when compared to the forty days between Christ's crucifixion and his so-called ascension into heaven.[62] The notice period of forty days **before** his death, presumably with Christ being detained all that time, most likely was simply converted to forty days **after** his death by Christian writers, as such an arrest would contradict the summary

trial and execution of Christ. That Christ was on a wanted list is attested to by John himself:

> But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.[63]

Whether apostasy was grounds enough for a warrant for his arrest to be issued is probably debatable. A forwards glimpse into the reason why Christ was being hunted by the authorities is presented by a claim by Hierocles, that **after Christ had been banished (rejected) by the Jews, he and nine hundred of his followers had turned to robbery**.[64] According to a specific version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, Christ had more than two thousand **armed** followers with him on the Mount of Olives,[65] and one copy of the *Josippon* even refers to the clash between Christ and the Pharisees:

> In those days there was much party strife and great disputes in Judaea between the Pharisees and **the 'robbers' in Israel who followed Jeshu'ah ben Pandera the Nasoraean**, who did great miracles in Israel until the Pharisees overpower him and hanged him upon a pole.[66]

That Christ had become a robber is possibly also attested to in the Talmud in the story of two identical brothers:

> After a time the one who took to robbery was caught, and they crucified him on a cross.[67]

Herford has no doubt that this passage refers to Christ but admits that he cannot explain the remark that one (Christ) had 'taken to robbery.'[68]

Returning to the Crucifixion, it may be argued that if Christ had connections to the government, why would he not simply have

disappeared instead of risking death on the cross? The answer is probably twofold:

- In the same way his mother managed to escape from the clutches of Herod, his faked death would allow him to continue operating without the authorities actively looking for him.
- As a legitimate (but rejected) heir to the throne through Mary, he recognised the opportunity of fulfilling the promise of the long-awaited Messiah of the Hebrews:

> Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. **He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men**, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. **Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised**, and we esteemed him not.
>
> Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.
>
> But **he was pierced** for our transgressions**, he was crushed** for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we were healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
>
> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so did he not open his mouth. By oppression and judgement he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? **For he was cut off from the land of the living**; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. **He was assigned a grave**

> **with the wicked, and with the rich in his death**, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.
>
> Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, **he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand**.
>
> After the suffering of his soul, **he will see the light of life and be satisfied**; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, **and he will divide the spoils with the strong**, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.[69]

This passage from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament must certainly be one of the most beautiful in the Bible, and the person described in it is practically identical to Christ, who was a diminutive man with a deformed body and scary looks (see section 6.1). There can be no doubt that Christ could justify all his actions, including those of robbery, to his followers, the vast majority of whom came from the lower echelons of life and probably saw the rich and famous as wicked, deserving to be robbed of their possessions and later also their lives. To them, he had become the equivalent of the fabled Robin Hood, who 'robbed from the rich and gave to the poor.'[70] The level of Christ's aggression against the rich and the powerful grew as his support grew, ultimately culminating in the rebellion of the Jews against Rome.

The text from Isaiah would not only match Christ physically but would also dictate step by step what he needed to do in order to qualify as the Messiah. Ultimately he would have to die but rise again from the dead.

During his violent rise to rebellion against the upper class of Jewish society and eventually the Romans, Christ would have realised that his fate, should he be captured, would be death on the

cross. One can hardly imagine that he would have surrendered himself for crucifixion for the sole purpose of fulfilling the prophecy, as crucifixion was the most horrific formal form of execution known at that time. In one of his moral letters to his friend Lucilius, Seneca, a Roman philosopher, statesman, and dramatist, wrote:

> Thence came that most debased of prayers, in which Maecenas does not refuse to suffer weakness, deformity, and as a climax the pain of crucifixion provided only that he may prolong the breath of life amid these sufferings:
>
> Fashion me with a palsied hand,
> Weak of foot, and a cripple;
> Build upon me a crook-backed hump;
> Shake my teeth till they rattle;
> All is well, if my life remains.
> Save, oh, save it, I pray you,
> Though I sit on the piercing cross!
>
> There he is, praying for that which, if it had befallen him, would be the most pitiable thing in the world! And seeking a postponement of suffering, as if he were asking for life! I should deem him most despicable had he wished to live up to the very time of crucifixion: 'Nay,' he cries, 'you may weaken my body if you will only leave the breath of life in my battered and ineffective carcass! Maim me if you will, but allow me, misshapen and deformed as I may be, just a little more time in the world! You may nail me up and set my seat upon the piercing cross!' Is it worthwhile to weigh down upon one's own wound, and hang impaled upon a gibbet, that one may but postpone something which is the balm of troubles, the end of punishment? Is it worth all this to possess the breath of life only to give it up? What would you ask for Maecenas but the indulgence

> of Heaven? What does he mean by such womanish and indecent verse? What does he mean by making terms with panic fear? What does he mean by begging so vilely for life? He cannot ever have heard Virgil read the words:
>
> Tell me, is Death so wretched as that?
>
> He asks for the climax of suffering, and—what is still harder to bear—prolongation and extension of suffering; and what does he gain thereby? Merely the boon of a longer existence. But what sort of life is a lingering death? Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain, dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumours on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony? I think he would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross![71]

This is a most intriguing passage, not only for the vivid description of the agony of death on the cross (the context in which it is usually quoted) but also his description of Maecenas begging for life. Maecenas (70–8 BCE), a wealthy Roman public figure, confidant, and political advisor to the future emperor Augustus and a patron of Augustan poets,[72] was much derided by Seneca for his effeminate ways and lack of manliness.[73] Seneca was a contemporary of Christ (4 BCE–65 CE)[74] and would very likely have been aware of the developments in Judea.

In what must be an extraordinary coincidence, the poetic caricature of Maecenas on the cross bears a striking resemblance to physical descriptions of Christ as alluded to earlier and discussed in section 6.1. This prayer of Maecenas survived only in the works of Seneca,

and one may be tempted to wonder if Seneca had not somehow based this description on what was known about Christ!

That Christ's betrayal by Judas was prearranged is suggested by Matthew

> Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.…' Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, 'Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?' Jesus answered, 'You have said so.'[75]

and is also attested to by *The Gospel of Judas*.[76] In this long-lost document, Christ instructs Judas about his own fate:

> *Judas*: Master, could it be that my seed is under the control of the rulers [or 'that my seed subdues the rulers (archons)']?
> *Christ*: …but you will grieve much when you see the kingdom and all its generation.
> *Judas*: What good is it that I have received? For you have set me apart for that generation.
> *Christ*: You will become **the thirteenth generation**, **and you will be cursed by the other generations**—and you will come to rule over them. In the last days they will curse your ascent to the holy [generation].

Christ also tells Judas that he wants to 'teach [him] about [secrets] no person [has] ever seen,' and elaborates on the Self-Generated and his aeons (the Self-Willed, see section 3.2). The most controversial text from *The Gospel of Judas* must certainly be Christ's foretelling (instruction) of his betrayal by Judas:

> But you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me [literally 'that bears me']

Irenaeus refers to *The Gospel of Judas* in his refutation of heresies:

> For Sophia was in the habit of carrying off that which belonged to her from them to herself. They declare that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things, **and that he alone, knowing the truth as no others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal**; by him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were thus thrown into confusion. They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they style the Gospel of Judas.[77]

In other words, Christ had secretly instructed Judas to 'betray' him. It is clear that Judas was initially apprehensive about betraying his Master in this fashion, but that Christ managed to persuade him to do so by promising him a special place in heaven. The reference to Judas being elevated to the thirteenth generation and cursed by others matches the rejection Joseph and Mariamne (Sophia) suffered when they turned from Judaism.

There are several aspects of Judas's betrayal that are curious if not suspicious:

- Why did Christ elect Judas at all if he, being God, knew up front that Judas would betray him?
- Even though he knew that Judas was not to be trusted, Christ took no action to avoid being captured through Judas's betrayal. He should at least have expelled Judas from his inner circle the moment he got wind of his plans. It would therefore seem that being captured was part and parcel of Christ's plot to escape the Romans.
- Judas supposedly agreed to identify the man to be captured by kissing him.[78] Whatever the reason for kissing Christ might have been, if it happened at all, it was not to identify Christ. Given his physical appearance as described in section 6.1, those who came to arrest him would have known exactly what he looked like. The warrant for his arrest would no doubt have included a physical description of Christ.

If the allegations by various sources that Christ and his followers had become robbers are true, there can be little doubt that he was pursued by the authorities as a criminal, over and above the turmoil he caused amongst the Jews. The only way out would then be to stage his own death, as his mother had done to escape from her predicament. It would make sense that if Christ had indeed planned to be captured, he would have ensured that his capture went smoothly. In an ambush or skirmish between his followers and the authorities, there would always have been a chance that he could be killed by an overzealous soldier. According to Matthew and Mark, Christ was arrested by a crowd armed with swords and clubs, suggesting that he was a well-known villain, but John specifically states that his arrest was made by a detachment of soldiers accompanied by some armed officials of the priests and pharisees.[79]

Matthew and Luke relate that a Roman officer was converted and became a follower of Christ after the so-called healing of his servant.[80] This supernatural healing must simply have been one of Christ's carefully orchestrated deceptions (see section 5.4) and would have required the cooperation of the officer, if witnessed by others at all. It is strange that the accounts given by Matthew and Luke differ in one particular respect. In Matthew's account the centurion himself came to see Christ; but in Luke's, the centurion sent intermediaries and did not actually meet Christ himself. Christ's crucifixion was overseen by a Roman centurion[81] who supposedly proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God when Christ died. It is very likely that this centurion and the one whose servant was 'healed' were one and the same person. It would have been crucial that no one saw the centurion meeting with Jesus before the Crucifixion, so Luke's account must be the correct one. This centurion would have been responsible for ensuring that Christ did not perish on the cross.

4.5 Golgotha, the Place of the Crucifixion

The final days of Christ were marked by some key events,[82] which included the triumphal entry into Jerusalem,[83] the cleansing of the temple,[84] Christ's anointment by Mary Magdalene at Bethany,[85] the Last Supper,[86] Christ's anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his arrest, trial, and crucifixion at a place called Golgotha. Of specific interest here are the names of the places associated with these events.

Bethany

The village called Bethany is mentioned in relation to several incidents in the New Testament:[87]

- The raising of Lazarus from the dead.[88]
- The entry of Christ into Jerusalem, which began near Bethany.[89] It was from this village that he commandeered a colt to ride on and to which he returned after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem[90] and his storming of the temple.[91]
- The dinner in the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany, at which Mary Magdalene anointed Christ (see section 7.1).
- The Ascension of Christ into heaven from Bethany[92] or the Mount of Olives.[93]

John also mentions a Bethany 'beyond the Jordan' as the place where John the Baptist operated,[94] but the Jordan is significantly farther from Jerusalem than Lazarus's Bethany, which was located 2.8 km east of Jerusalem at the base of the southwestern slope of the Mount of Olives, not far from Bethphage.[95]

The etymology of the name Bethany is not clear, but it must certainly translate as 'House-of-X,' from the Hebrew word *bayith*.[96] Since the first part of the name refers to a house, and not a village or city, it is likely that the name referred to a specific estate, probably belonging to a particular wealthy individual. Several possibilities exist for the latter part of the name, as shown in table 4.1.

Hebrew word	Meaning	House
tᵉ'ênâh[97]	fig, fruit, date	House of Figs
'ānîyâh[98]	lamentation, sorrow	House of Misery
'ânîy[99]	me, mine	My House
'anah[100]	poor	House of the Poor
'ōniy[101]	ship, fleet	House of Ships
'ôwnâh[102]	pronounced 'o-naw'—to dwell together; sexual cohabitation	House of Union/Sex
'ôwn[103]	pronounced 'one'—wealth, power	House of the Rich Man
tânâh[104]	to bargain with (a harlot)	House of the Whore(s)
tânâh[105]	celebrate, commemorate	House of Celebration

Table 4.1 Hebrew equivalents for Beth(any)

Of these interpretations, 'House of Misery' and 'My House' are probably the least feasible. It is certainly possible that Bethany estate may have been known for its date palms or figs. Christ cursed a fig tree shortly before his death,[106] and this may have been a specific tree on the estate he frequented. If the tree had been poisoned or damaged sufficiently to cause it to wither (see section 5.4), it would have required time and opportunity to do so.

In section 7.1, it is argued that the names Simon the Leper and Simon the Tanner[107] both refer to Simon Boethus, the father of Mariamne II, Eleazar (Lazarus), and Martha. The house of Simon the Tanner was near the sea, at Joppa, which is far from Bethany and Jerusalem, but it is highly probable that Simon Boethus owned property in Jerusalem, where he resided, and near the sea, where he conducted his business. He certainly would have owned commercial vessels to export his produce, and as such, Bethany may have

referred to the owner of the 'House of Ships,' although such a link is rather unlikely.

Simon Boethus and several of his sons served as high priests and were therefore in a position of extreme power and wealth. The interpretation 'House of Union' may refer to a place of sexual encounters (which is unlikely), while 'House of the Rich Man' would match the social status of Simon Boethus. Simon Boethus's dwelling would certainly not have been known as 'House of the Poor.'

Finally, if Bethany is considered to be a concatenation of *Bayith* and *tânâh*, two possibilities arise. The estate may have been known by the derogatory name 'House of the Whore,' which would be an apt description of the residence of Mary Magdalene, Christ's sinful woman, and Simon Magus's Helena, whom he called his 'whore' (see section 6.3). The most likely interpretation, however, appears to be 'House of Celebration.' As discussed in section 7.1, Simon Boethus was infamous for his lust for the good life.

Gethsemane

The chronology regarding the movements of Christ shortly before his arrest differs somewhat between the synoptic Gospels and John. According to the synoptic Gospels, Christ was anointed by Mary Magdalene in the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany; Judas conspired with the priests to betray Christ; the Last Supper was held; Christ went into the garden of Gethsemane, an olive grove on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, where he was overwhelmed by fear; Judas and the priests arrived to arrest him in this garden; and his trial proceeded. Only John records that Roman soldiers help carry out Christ's arrest, but instead of Judas pointing out Christ, John has Judas merely leading the arresting party to Christ. Christ himself asks them who they are looking for, and when they reply "Jesus of Nazareth," he acknowledges that it is he.

The garden of Gethsemane was a place frequented by Christ[108] and was presumably close to the house of Simon the Leper, if not on the same estate as the latter. It was on this very mountain that Christ regularly addressed his disciples,[109] and one can therefore assume with reasonable certainty that this estate and the house of Simon the Leper served as his headquarters. The name Gethsemane is usually assumed to mean 'oil press,'[110] from *gath*,[111] a winepress or vat, and *shemen*,[112] pronounced *sheh'-men*, meaning 'grease,' 'oil,' or 'ointment.' The latter part of the name may also have originated from the word *shâmên*,[113] pronounced *shaw-mane*, meaning 'greasy,' 'gross,' or 'rich' in the figurative sense. The latter is a closer phonetic equivalent to (Geth)semani, and the name therefore rather appears to mean 'winepress of the rich.' This would be an apt description of the wealth of Simon Boethus, who would have been one of the richest men in Jerusalem.

Golgotha

Christ was crucified at a place named Golgotha (Hebrew) and also Calvary.[114] Golgotha is generally interpreted as 'the place of the skull' from the Hebrew word *gulgôleth*,[115] meaning 'a skull.' This word is phonetically somewhat similar to *golgotha* and is probably the reason why the authors of the Gospels associated *golgotha* with 'skull.' The Greek translation is usually assumed to have been derived from the words *kraniōn*,[116] meaning 'skull,' and *tōpōs*,[117] meaning 'a place or location.' In some translations the name Calvary is used as an equivalent for 'the place of the skull,' from the Latin *calvaria calvariae*,[118] 'a skull or a place of skulls.'

There is nevertheless a host of Hebrew words that could potentially be combined to form names phonetically similar to *golgotha*, as summarised in table 4.2.

Hebrew word	Meaning
gâ'al[119]	to redeem/to be next of kin/revenger
gâ'al[120]	to soil/to desecrate
gô'el[121]	to defile
gal[122]	a heap/something rolled/a spring
gôl[123]	a cup for oil/a bowl
gûwl[124]	to rejoice/to fear/to be glad
gâ'al[125]	to detest/to reject, to abhor
gô'al[126]	abhorrence/loathing
gê'ûwth[127]	pride/majesty
gath[128]	a winepress
tâ'âh[129]	a room
tâ'âh[130]	designated

Table 4.2. Hebrew words that can be combined to form Golgotha

From table 4.2 numerous combinations can theoretically be made to form words phonetically similar to *gol-goth-(t)a*, some possibly linked to Christ's physical appearance (*gô'al*), his deeds (*gô'el*, *gâ'al*), the stone rolled to cover his grave (*gal*), a vineyard (*gôl*, *gath*), and even his rejected royal line of descent (*gâ'al*). However, the most likely combination is probably *gôl-gath*, meaning 'bowl (of) the winepress.' This interpretation would match that of Gethsemane as 'winepress of the rich.'

According to the itinerary of the anonymous Pilgrim of Bordeaux (333 CE),[131] the place of crucifixion was near Mount Zion, which lies next to the Mount of Olives, and the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Christ was supposedly buried, was 'about a stone's throw' away from the place of the Crucifixion. As speculated by some,[132] Joseph's tomb was located in a cemetery near the place of execution. It therefore seems that Christ was crucified either on the property of Joseph of Arimathea (his father) or on the property of Simon Boethus,

both of which would have made his rescue from the cross that much easier. It would then also have been possible to restrict access to the site, allowing only a handful of essential witnesses, like Roman officials and high-ranking Jewish officials. There can be no doubt that Christ was taken from the cross directly into the house of Joseph of Arimathea, where he was to recover. The guards may have been deceived into believing that there actually was a body inside the cave, or they simply followed orders and asked no questions. Joseph's apostasy from Judaism (see section 3.1) would probably have caused his ostracism from the conservative Jewish community, and he may very well have been banned from preparing a tomb for himself in a cemetery. If so, his tomb would have been located on his own private property.

4.6 The Risen Lord

It is a fact of life that the dead cannot be revived. When the heart has stopped beating, permanent brain damage begins to set in after four to five minutes.[133] Even if Christ had died on the cross and was taken down immediately, it would have been impossible to revive him right then, not to mention three days after he had been buried. If Christ had indeed appeared to his disciples as recorded in the Gospels, there could be no doubt whatsoever that he had never died. Christ's deteriorating condition on the cross would have been closely monitored by his followers and most importantly, the centurion who supervised the Crucifixion. The piercing of his side by a soldier,[134] a requirement for the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy but most likely only a superficial cut, may have served as a sign for the soldiers to remove all bystanders and thereby allow Christ to be removed from the cross.

The Gospels relate that one or two angels of God, most likely young men dressed in white, had rolled away the stone covering Christ's grave.[135] Christ's body was no longer inside, and it is no wonder that the guards were struck with fear[136]—they faced execution for failing in their duty (quitting their post).[137] The open grave was

'discovered' by the women who used to tend to Christ, those being Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Christ, and probably another Mary—all part of the elaborate deception.

It is interesting that Mary thought she saw '**the gardener**' outside the grave,[138] and according to Tertullian:

> This is He whom His disciples secretly stole away, that it might be said He had risen again, **or the gardener abstracted**, that his lettuces might come to no harm from the crowds of visitants![139]

In addition, according to the *Toledot Yeshu*:

> Yeshu was put to death on the sixth hour on the eve of the Passover and of the Sabbath. When they tried to hang him on a tree it broke, for when he had possessed the power he had pronounced by the Ineffable Name that no tree should hold him. He had failed to pronounce the prohibition over the carob-stalk, for it was a plant more than a tree, and on it he was hanged until the hour for afternoon prayer, for it is written in Scripture, '**His body shall not remain all night upon the tree**.' They buried him outside the city.… On the first day of the week his bold followers came to Queen Helene with the report that he who was slain was truly the Messiah and was not in his grave; he had ascended to heaven as prophesied. Diligent search was made and he was not found in the grave where he had been buried. **A gardener had taken him from the grave** and had brought him into his own garden and buried him in the sand over which the waters flowed into the garden.[140]

The place of crucifixion and Christ's grave were therefore closely associated with a garden, most likely a garden renowned for its vegetable

produce. If this gardener was indeed the owner of the garden (the garden of Gethsemane), he would have been none other than Joseph of Arimathea, and the mention of Mary having seen the gardener at the tomb would confirm that Joseph was involved with the 'resurrection' of Christ.

5

Jesus and Simon Magus

> I am the Alpha and the Omega…who is, and who was, and who is to come.
>
> —Jesus Christ

> I am the Standing One…who stands, has stood, and will stand.
>
> —Simon Magus

One of the enigmas of Christianity is the person known as Simon Magus, or Simon the Magician. He is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles,[1] discussed at length in Clement's *Homilies*[2] and *Recognitions*,[3] and even recorded in Josephus's history of the Jewish people.[4] According to the early church fathers, he was the 'father of all heretics'[5] and 'the author of all heresy.'[6]

For some reason, Simon Magus presented himself as the Messiah in the same manner as did Christ:

> And sometimes imitating that he is Christ, he styles himself the Standing One.…Instead of our Christ, he proclaims himself,[7]

and many of his teachings and actions likewise match those of Christ. This leads to only two possible interpretations of the identity of Simon Magus:

- He was an imposter who attempted to impersonate Christ in every aspect and claimed to be everything Christ had claimed

to be. Although this is the accepted view of Simon Magus, it is rather absurd to think that some lunatic would go around posing as a person who was known to all in Israel (if the Gospels are to be believed).

- A much more logical interpretation would be that when Christ returned to Israel around 2 CE at the age of thirty, he had already earned himself a reputation as a magician and was in fact known as Simon Magus. During the next two decades, he attracted many followers and curious spectators, only a very few of whom would form his inner circle. These individuals would begin to refer to him as Jesus (Christ), while the masses who witnessed his miracles and listened to his teachings remembered him as Simon Magus. As argued in this treatise, he returned to Israel under the guise of Paul probably a couple of years after his crucifixion, but outsiders would still have remembered him as Simon Magus. It would then be no surprise that the legacy of Simon Magus survived throughout the first centuries of Christendom alongside that of Jesus Christ. However, later Christian writers attempted to distance Christ from Simon Magus, for reasons to be discussed.

In this chapter, evidence will be presented that Jesus Christ and Simon Magus were one and the same person.

5.1 Simon Magus and Dositheus, the Son of Cleopatrida

According to Clement, Simon Magus was a follower of John the Baptist,[8] upon whose death Dositheus took over leadership of the Baptist's movement. John the Baptist practised baptism and had a large popular following in Israel. He reportedly was a relative of Christ, as his mother Elizabeth was a cousin of Mary, Christ's mother.[9] If there is any truth in this claim, John the Baptist would have been more or less as old as Christ. According to the Gospels, Christ was baptised by John,[10] possibly suggesting that Christ initially was a

follower of John, perhaps only to size up the opposition. John supposedly claimed that he was merely the forerunner of Christ:

> I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'…He is the One who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.[11]

The existence of John the Baptist is confirmed by Josephus, who speaks highly of him.[12] Against the background sketched so far, it is, however, extremely unlikely that the Baptist would have recognised Christ as 'the Lord.' If he had made any comment about Christ at all, he may simply have acknowledged that Christ, as the son of Mariamne I, had some claim to kingship.

John the Baptist was executed by Herod Antipas, also known as Herod the Tetrarch, who ruled from 4 BCE to 39 CE.[13] Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great by Malthace, and according to biblical tradition,[14] John's death was brought about by his opposition to Herod Antipas marrying Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip and granddaughter of Mariamne I. Salome, Herodias's daughter, danced before Herod, who was so pleased that he offered her anything she might desire. At the instigation of her mother, she requested John's head to be brought to her on a platter, upon which he was executed.

Josephus also records that John the Baptist was executed by Herod the Tetrarch, but for a different reason—Herod feared that John might raise a rebellion against him and therefore had him eliminated. Josephus makes it clear that John was executed before the hostilities between Aretas, the father of the first wife of Herod Antipas, and Herod, escalated into full-scale war, and Herod's army was destroyed. The Jews believed that the destruction of Herod's army was divine retribution for his murder of John the Baptist.

It is important to consider the period during which John the Baptist became a prominent figure in Israel. According to Luke, this happened in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, ca.

29 CE.[15] However, Josephus appears to suggest that John the Baptist was executed by Herod around 36 CE, which is several years later than what is expected from the New Testament and after, not before, the Crucifixion of Christ.[16] Josephus's account is probably more accurate, as the early Christians attempted to boost the image of Christ by portraying everyone as having subjected themselves to Christ, hence the New Testament version. If John had indeed been born around 28 BCE, he would have been sixty-four years old when he was executed. He probably developed into a recognised religious leader from the death of Herod the Great onwards but only became involved in politics late in his life (ca. 29 CE), amidst the political turmoil of that time. Herod the Tetrarch may very well have had reason to view him as a political rival.

Scholars place the appearance, or reappearance, of Simon Magus after the death of John the Baptist, as Dositheus succeeded John the Baptist, and Simon Magus infiltrated Dositheus's group of followers and then had him murdered. **If we can identify a historic Dositheus**, it might help us date the appearance of Simon Magus on Israel's political scene.

Clement records two slightly different versions of Dositheus's succession to John the Baptist. In his *Recognitions* we read:

> For after that John the Baptist was killed, as you yourself also know, when **Dositheus** had broached his heresy, **with thirty other chief disciples**, **and one woman, who was called Luna**—whence also **these thirty** appear to have been appointed with reference to the number of the days, according to the course of the moon—this Simon ambitious of evil glory, as we have said, goes to Dositheus, and pretending friendship, entreats him, that if any one of **those thirty** should die, he should straightway substitute him in room of the dead: for it was contrary to their rule either to exceed the fixed number, or to admit any one

> who was unknown, or not yet proved; whence also the rest, desiring to become worthy of the place and number, are eager in every way to please, according to the institutions of their sect each one of those who aspire after admittance into the number, hoping that he may be deemed worthy to be put into the place of the deceased, when, as we have said, anyone dies. Therefore Dositheus, being greatly urged by this man, introduced Simon when a vacancy occurred among the number.
>
> …Meantime, at the outset, **as soon as he was reckoned among the thirty disciples of Dositheus**, he began to depreciate Dositheus himself, saying that he did not teach purely or perfectly, and that this was the result not of ill intention, but of ignorance. **But Dositheus**, when he perceived that Simon was depreciating him, fearing lest his reputation among men might be obscured (for he himself was supposed to be the Standing One), **moved with rage, when they met as usual at the school, seized a rod, and began to beat Simon**; but suddenly the rod seemed to pass through his body, as if it had been smoke. On which Dositheus, being astonished, says to him, '**Tell me if thou art the Standing One, that I may adore thee**.' And when Simon answered that he was, then **Dositheus**, perceiving that he himself was not the Standing One, **fell down** and worshipped him, and gave up his own place as chief to Simon, ordering all the rank of thirty men to obey him; himself taking the inferior place which Simon formerly occupied. **Not long after this he died.**[17]

The version in his *Homilies* is slightly different:

> **He being absent in Egypt for the practice of magic**, and John being killed, **Dositheus desiring the leadership,**

> **falsely gave out that Simon was dead**, and succeeded to the seat. But Simon, returning not long after, and strenuously holding by the place as his own, when he met with Dositheus did not demand the place, knowing that a man who has attained power beyond his expectations cannot be removed from it. Wherefore with pretended friendship he gives himself for a while to the second place, under Dositheus. But taking his place after a few days among the thirty fellow-disciples, he began to malign Dositheus as not delivering the instructions correctly. And this he said that he did, not through unwillingness to deliver them correctly, but through ignorance. And on one occasion, **Dositheus**, perceiving that this artful accusation of Simon was dissipating the opinion of him with respect to many, so that they did not think that he was the Standing One**, came in a rage to the usual place of meeting, and finding Simon, struck him with a staff**. But it seemed to pass through the body of Simon as if he had been smoke. Thereupon Dositheus, being confounded, said to him, 'If you are the Standing One, I also will worship you.' Then Simon said that he was; and Dositheus, knowing that he himself was not the Standing One, fell down and worshipped; and associating himself with the twenty-nine chiefs, he raised Simon to his own place of repute; and thus, not many days after, **Dositheus himself, while he (Simon) stood, fell down and died**.[18]

It is probably more than coincidence that Dositheus had thirty followers, while thirty aeons are mentioned in the *Pistis Sophia* narratives. As argued in section 3.2, the number of thirty aeons is probably based on the number of descendants of Hasmon, the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty, and it may be that Dositheus honoured this dynasty by allowing no more than thirty men as his close followers. It

was only after Christ's crucifixion (Simon Magus's crucifixion) that Mary Magdalene (Luna, in Clementine's text) became his mistress.

Clement's remark that Dositheus believed that Simon Magus was dead could have been based on a popular belief that Mariamne's son did not survive after her 'execution,' as the infant must somehow have been located by Herod and killed. A more likely scenario would be that Dositheus believed, like most others, that Simon Magus had been crucified and was dead. His mention of Simon's return would then refer either to the return of Simon Magus from Egypt following the death of Herod the Great or his return to Israel from the British Isles or wherever he recuperated after his staged crucifixion.

Dositheus, Son of Cleopatrida

Josephus mentions a couple of persons by the name of Dositheus, the first of whom, along with Onias,[19] was one of the generals of Ptolemy VI Philometor who ruled from 180–145 BCE. This Dositheus could obviously not have had any involvement with Christ.

The second Dositheus of note appears in Josephus's account of the honours that were awarded by Julius Caesar to the Jews before he embarked on his African Campaign in 47 BCE[20] and the events that followed his assassination. In his list of declarations by Caesar, he announced that Hyrcanus II, the son of Alexander, and his children would rule over the nation of the Jews.[21] Following the death of Caesar, Hyrcanus successfully appealed to the Romans to free Jewish citizens in the empire from military service, on account of the 'superstition they were under,' meaning their religious rites. One of the declarations to this effect reads:

> The declaration of Lucius Lentulus the consul: 'I have dismissed those Jews who are Roman citizens, and who appear to me to have their religious rites…on account of the superstition they are under.…The declaration of Marcus Publius, the son of Spurius, and of Marcus, the son of

> Marcus, and of Lucius, the son of Publius: We went to the proconsul, and informed him of what **Dositheus, the son of Cleopatrida of Alexandria**, desired, that, if he thought good, **he would dismiss (from military service) those Jews who were Roman citizens, and were accustomed to observe the rites of the Jewish religion**, on account of the superstition they were under. Accordingly, he did dismiss them. This was done before the thirteenth of the calends of October.[22]

Earlier, Josephus records that Alexander, son of Dositheus (probably the Dositheus of Marcus Publius), who was an ambassador of the Jews, and others renewed 'that league of goodwill and friendship with the Romans which was in being before.'[23] When we next hear of a Dositheus, he is named as a trusted friend of Hyrcanus.[24] At that stage Hyrcanus was the only remaining obstacle in Herod the Great's pursuit to become king of the Jews, but whereas Hyrcanus appeared to be indifferent to Herod's aspirations, his daughter Alexandra recognised the threat. She convinced her father to entrust Dositheus with a letter to Malchus, the governor of Arabia, in which she beseeched him to receive Hyrcanus and his family and secure them from Herod. Herod was married to her daughter Mariamne I and had not long before orchestrated the murder of her son Aristobulus.[25] Shortly after the murder of her son, Alexandra wrote to Cleopatra in Egypt, who persuaded Antony to summon Herod and explain his actions.[26]

Herod feared for his life and left to see Antony. He instructed Joseph, his uncle, to guard Mariamne and also instructed him that should he not return, Mariamne should also be killed. When rumours began circulating that Herod had been put to death by Antony, Alexandra tried to persuade Joseph to flee with her and her family to the Roman legions that were stationed near the city. Herod, however, returned, and the plan was dropped. Mariamne confronted Herod about his instruction that she should be killed in case of his demise,

and he had Joseph summarily executed for this breach of trust. Herod would later again leave Mariamne behind to be guarded by Sohemus, a faithful servant of his, and Joseph, his treasurer (discussed in chapter 2).

Against this background, Dositheus must have realised that Herod would have had the power to have them returned from Arabia with dire consequences for all involved, so he handed Herod Hyrcanus's letter to Malchus. This ultimately gave Herod the opportunity to have Hyrcanus executed, ca. 30 BCE. Hyrcanus's granddaughter Mariamne was 'executed' about a year later. Josephus records that **Herod had Dositheus killed shortly afterwards.**[27]

Given that there was a Dositheus who was closely associated with Hyrcanus and assisted him in his requests for the Jews to be pardoned from military service and that there was another Dositheus who had become a close friend of Hyrcanus, these two individuals most likely would have been the same person. Whether or not this is the case, the latter Dositheus must have known the young Mariamne as a child, since Hyrcanus II was her grandfather, and he would have witnessed the trials and tribulations of her marriage to Herod the Great.

In postexilic times children were increasingly being named after their grandparents,[28] so it is possible that Dositheus, the son of Cleopatrida, had a grandson of the same name. If so, given the close ties between her grandfather and Dositheus, the son of Cleopatrida, Mariamne must certainly have known his family before her 'execution.' It would make sense that when Mariamne returned to Israel after Herod's death, she would have turned to those she knew from the past, including Dositheus, the grandson of Dositheus, the son of Cleopatrida. He may have been pleased to see her but evidently not her son, who would claim to be the heir to the throne of Judea. It seems that this Dositheus became politically visible during the first couple of decades following the death of Herod the Great and posed a serious threat or obstacle to Christ.

The hypothesis that Dositheus of Simon Magus was somehow related to Dositheus the son of Cleopatrida as argued above is supported by Aboulfatah, an Arab historian who flourished in the fourteenth century and who claims that Simon's Dositheus lived in the days of John Hyrcanus I, who died in 105 BCE.[29] It was John Hyrcanus II, who was a friend of Dositheus, and there can be little doubt that Aboulfatah had mistakenly associated Dositheus with John Hyrcanus I instead of John Hyrcanus II, as was the actual case.

The Sadducees

Pseudo-Tertullian records that Dositheus, the successor of John the Baptist, was effectively the founder of the sect of the Sadducees:

> Of which heretics I will (to pass by a good deal) summarize some few particulars. For of Judaism's heretics I am silent—Dositheus the Samaritan, **I mean, who was the first who had the hardihood to repudiate the prophets**, on the ground that they had not spoken under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. **Of the Sadducees I am silent, who, springing from the root of this error**, had the hardihood to adjoin to this heresy the denial likewise of the resurrection of the flesh.[30]

The Sadducees were closely associated with the Hasmonean line of high priests[31] and followed the Hebrew bible literally, rejecting the Oral Torah. This strict adherence to the letter of the Laws of Moses matches the description of Hyrcanus and Dositheus (of Cleopatrida) appealing for the Romans to pardon Jews from military duty because of their religious rites. It would seem, however, that Dositheus had become disillusioned with the religious beliefs of his time, and as his stature amongst the Jews grew, he began forming his own religious ideas. His views were propagated by his son or grandson following his death at the hands of Herod the Great.

A legend that circulated amongst rabbis during the second century also attributed the founding of the Sadducees to the time of Hyrcanus. This legend relates the following:

> Antigonus of Socho received [the oral tradition] from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: Do not be like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a grant, but rather be like servants who serve their master without the intent of receiving a grant; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.
>
> …**Antigonus had two students, Tzadok and Boethus**. When they heard this teaching, they departed his presence and without understanding his intent said to each other, 'The master has stated that there is no reward, nor punishment, nor hope.'
>
> They continued speaking to each other **until they denied the Torah**. To each was attracted a following, whom the Sages referred to as **Sadducees and Boethusians**. When they saw that they could not draw the masses to the faith that they conceived—for this wicked creed creates division among those united, instead of joining together those dispersed—**they changed tactics, and declared the truth of the Written Torah, for they could not deny it before the masses**. [Indeed,] had they denied its truth, they would have been executed. Each of them tried to create the impression among his followers that he **believed in the Written Torah, but challenged the Oral Tradition, saying that it was not genuine**.
>
> After these cursed sects arose, they were followed by other groups of nonbelievers, including those who are called Karaites in this land—Egypt. The Sages would refer to all these [types of deviants with the general terms,] Sadducees and Boethusians. And it is they who began to

> besmirch the tradition, to expound the scriptures according to the perspective of any man[32]

Several passages in the Talmud refer indifferently to the Sadducees and the Boethusians,[33] and through Pseudo-Tertullian and rabbinical legend, Dositheus is linked to the family of Simon Boethus, the father of Mariamne II. It would seem that towards the end of the Hasmonean era, various liberal religious ideas were beginning to develop amongst the elite of the Jews, and Dositheus evidently formed part of this new wave of thought.

The founding of the sect of the Sadducees therefore occurred during the times of John Hyrcanus II, Herod the Great, and Simon Boethus, possibly around 30 BCE. It is not known when John Hyrcanus was born, but he was installed as high priest in 76 BCE, an office he held till 40 BCE.[34] Dositheus of Cleopatrida requested the pardoning of Roman Jews from military service around 49 BCE, when Lentulus and Caius Marcellus were consuls of Rome,[35,36] and as a high-ranking official of the Jewish people, he would have known Hyrcanus. As argued above, his grandson most likely had the same name, and he would probably have been a public figure when Mariamne and her son returned to Israel or when she and Christ returned to Israel after he recovered from his ordeal on the cross.

Concluding Remarks Regarding Dositheus

Origen states that the Dositheans were never in a flourishing state and that in his time they had almost entirely disappeared, **scarcely thirty of them being left**.[37] Origen lived ca. 185–254 CE,[38] and it is certainly possible that only thirty of the Dosithean sect had survived up to that time, but the number thirty rather seems to refer to the original limit of thirty followers set by Dositheus.

Jerome records of Simon Magus:

> Then came Simon Magus and his disciple **Menander**. They asserted themselves to be powers of God.…I say nothing of the Jewish heretics who before the coming of Christ destroyed the law delivered to them: of Dositheus, the leader of the Samaritans who rejected the prophets: of the Sadducees who sprang from his root and denied even the resurrection of the flesh.[39]

Josephus mentions a Titus Appius Menander,[40] who was part of a tribunal addressed by Lentulus to dismiss the Roman Jews from performing military service. This Menander was a contemporary of Dositheus of Cleopatrida and could very well have been the Menander referred to by Jerome. If so, it would appear that he had become a supporter of Christ (Simon Magus) when he returned to Israel from Egypt, perhaps believing that Christ had a rightful claim to the throne of Judea.

To summarise, it appears that following the death of John the Baptist, Dositheus reluctantly allowed the little creature called Simon Magus into his leadership circle. When he discovered what Simon Magus was up to, he beat him with a staff in an attempt to drive him away. His death a couple of days later most likely involved Dositheus being forced to admit on his knees that Simon Magus was the Standing One, before being killed in the presence of Simon Magus ('while Simon was Standing').

According to Epiphanius, Dositheus died in a cave after fasting too long.[41] It is more likely that Dositheus was taken to the very cave in which Christ was born (see section 1.1) and held captive for days without food and water, until Christ (Simon Magus) eventually arrived and ordered his execution. This cruel death may have been motivated by his grandfather's role in Hyrcanus's death (he had betrayed Hyrcanus by handing the Malchus letter to Herod). This is supported by another legend that relates in the words of Mead:

> In a Samaritan Chronicle. Where it is said that…Dositheus was compelled to 'fly' to the mountain and hide himself in a cave, where he died from want of food.…and the conclusion of Shemtob form of the *Toledoth*…**where Jesus flies away to a cave on Mount Caramel**.[42]

The curious description of Simon Magus as the Standing One is possibly the result of a misinterpretation of his original Hebrew description. The Hebrew word for 'to stand' is *'âmad*,[43] which also means 'to stay,' 'still,' or 'remain.' It is therefore likely that Dositheus did not ask Simon Magus whether he was the **Standing One** but rather whether he was the **Remaining One**, meaning the last survivor of the Hasmonean bloodline. Christ was Mariamne's last and only living son, since her two most prominent sons by Herod, Alexander and Aristobulus, were murdered by their father[44] around 6 BCE,[45] shortly before his death. In *The Acts of Peter*, Simon Magus describes himself as:

> I am He that standeth, and I shall go up to my Father and say unto him: Me also, **even thy son that standeth**, have they desired to pull down; but I consented not unto them, and am returned back unto myself.[46]

The text can probably be interpreted as 'the son who remains' or 'remains standing.'

5.2 Comparison of Simon Magus and Jesus Christ

Although the Christian accounts of Simon Magus suggest that he was an impersonator of Christ, there are numerous aspects of their lives that suggest that they were actually one and the same person.

- Hippolytus, in his *Refutation of All Heresies*, writes:

> In this way we must think concerning Simon the Magician…let us endeavour to teach anew the parrots of

> Simon, that Christ, **who stood, stands, and will stand**, (that is, was, is, and is to come,) was not Simon.[47]

With this remark Hippolytus (died ca. 235 CE)[48] inadvertently confirms that the heretics had long maintained that Simon Magus and Jesus Christ were one and the same person.

- John the Baptist said of Christ:

> 'I baptize with water, but **among you stands one** you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'[49]

Here, once again, Christ is described as 'he who stands,' the epithet of Simon Magus.

- Simon Magus was a 'most vehement orator, trained in the dialectic art,'[50] matching Christ's ability to entertain crowds.
- Simon Magus rejected Jerusalem and substituted Mount Gerizim for it.[51] Josephus records that Pilate suppressed a disturbance amongst the Samaritans, which was instigated by a liar:

> But the nation of the Samaritans did not escape without disturbances. **The man who excited them to it was one who thought lying a thing of little consequence, and who contrived everything so that the multitude might be pleased; so he directed them to get together upon Mount Gerizim**, which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them, that when they were come there, he would show them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there. So they came there armed, and thought the discourse of the man probable; and as they abode at a certain village, which was called Tirathaba, **they got the rest together to them, and desired to go up**

> **the mountain in a great multitude together**; but Pilate prevented their going up, by seizing the roads with a great band of horsemen and footmen, who fell upon those that were gotten together in the village; and when it came to an action, some of them they killed, and others of them they put to flight, and took a great many alive, **the principal of which, and also the most potent of those that fled away, Pilate ordered to be killed**.[52]

Christ is known to have spent much time with his followers on the Mount of Olives but evidently also on Mount Gerizim,[53] where he confronted a Samaritan woman, who declared:

> I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain

The mountain in question was Mount Gerizim, and Christ made no secret of his resentment of Jerusalem:

> Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you…your house is left to you desolate ('God will abandon his temple and his city')[54]
>
> …The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side…They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.

Eisler,[55] probably along with others, concludes that this 'liar' must have been Simon Magus.

The 'disturbance' and Pilate's subsequent order for the (arrest and) execution of the escaped leader may very well refer to the arrest and subsequent execution of Christ. As discussed

earlier, Josephus must have known Christ very well and apparently rejected him when he realised that Christ was a liar and deceiver.

- Both Christ and Simon Magus preached on the slopes of mountains. Josephus records that:

> **There came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet**, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the **Mount of Olives**, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. He said further, that he would show them from hence how, at **his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down**. Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred alive. **But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more.** And again the robbers stirred up the people to make war with the Romans, and said they ought not to obey them at all; **and when any persons would not comply with them, they set fire to their villages, and plundered them.**[56]

Felix was the Roman procurator of Judea from 52 to 58 CE,[57] and the Egyptian whom he defeated is easily identifiable with Simon Magus.[58-60] This event also matches the account of Christ and his followers ('robbers') on the Mount of Olives as described in section 4.4. It is also noteworthy that this uprising is described

in the Acts of the Apostles, where Paul is accused of being this very Egyptian:

> Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?[61]

As argued before, 'Paul' was the alias Christ had adopted after his crucifixion, from where he continued to build his forces for the final assault on Jerusalem and the Romans. The manner in which 'persons' had to 'comply' with the robbers is discussed in section 10.1.

- In the Clementine texts, Simon Magus is depicted as being involved with Peter in lengthy arguments on a variety of religious topics. From the Gospels, it is clear that Christ and Simon Peter often discussed or even argued about religion (Christ even referred to him as 'Satan'),[62] and Peter thought nothing of objecting to Christ about Mary Magdalene's domination of their discussions:

> My Lord, we will not endure this woman, for she taketh the opportunity from us and hath let none of us speak, but she discourseth many times.[63]

Bystanders would have remembered these presumably public discussions as having occurred between Simon Magus and Peter, while the disciples recorded them as between Christ and Peter. To counter these allegations, early Christian writers portrayed Simon Magus as an altogether different person.

- It is assumed by some scholars that Christ's name was Yeshu or Yeshua,[64] but like the name 'Christ,' meaning 'the anointed one'[65] in Greek, *Yeshua* simply means 'he will save,'[66] i.e., 'Saviour' in Hebrew. It is probably more than coincidence that the word

yêsh,[67] meaning 'is, are, will,' is derived from a root meaning 'to stand out' or 'to exist.' It seems possible that a form of this word in ancient Hebrew could have meant 'He who stands,' **suggesting that the Jews knew him by that name, the name of Simon Magus**. Christ may even have chosen this nickname for himself, as he was physically no taller than a child and would not stand out anywhere but would be the one to stand out as the greatest of all, the Messiah. Through this interpretation Christ would be linked to Mary, who as related earlier was described in the Talmud as Stata Mater, the Standing Mother.

- Another clue suggesting that Christ and Simon Magus were the same person is Christ's renaming of Simon Peter to **Cephas**,[68] most likely because Christ had become irritated by the constant confusion as to which Simon was being addressed. That Christ renamed his close followers who had identical names is supported by the apocryphal *The Genealogies of the Twelve Apostles*:

> And Bartholomew was of the house of Naphtali; now his name was formerly John, but the Lord changed his name because of John the son of Zebedee, his beloved.[69]

He was therefore most likely known as John bar Tholomy, but Christ chose to refer to him by his surname only, to avoid similar irritation.

- In several apocryphal texts, Christians admit that they, along with Christ, were known as or were accused of being sorcerers (see section 9.4). Simon Magus was likewise accused of being a sorcerer or magician, hence his name (a magician is called 'magus' in Latin[70]). Zindler, who claims the miracle-working Christ to be a fictional character,[71] concludes that the legends of Christ, Simon Magus, and Ben Stada having obtained their magic in Egypt must have had the same source.[72] As quoted by Zindler, in Clement's *Romance* it is recorded that:

> **During a stay in Egypt, he** [Simon Magus] **acquired a large measure of Greek culture** and attained to an extensive knowledge of magic and ability in it. He then came forward claiming to be accepted as a mighty power of the very God who has created the world. On occasion he sets himself up for the Messiah and describes himself as the Standing One.

while the Talmud recounts Ben Stada (Christ) as having brought his magic from Egypt.[73] The early Christian apologist Arnobius of Sicca (ca. 305 CE),[74] in his *Adversus Gentes*, fumes against accusations that Christ was a sorcerer:

> My opponent will perhaps meet me with many other slanderous and childish charges that are commonly urged. **Jesus was a Magician**. He effected all these things by secret arts. **From the shrines of the Egyptians** He stole the names of the angels of might, and **the religious system of a remote country**.…Were, then, those things which were done, the freaks of demons, and **the tricks of magical arts**?[75]

The religious system of a 'remote country' obtained by Christ while in Egypt matches the 'large measure of Greek culture' acquired by Simon Magus while in Egypt. The remote country more likely must have been Persia and the culture that of Zoroaster, where Christ had grown up as a young boy.

- Ben Stada reputedly brought his magic from Egypt by means of cuts made into his skin, while the *Toledot Yeshu* recounts that Christ (Yeshu) stole the *shem* (the letters of God's Ineffable Name) from the Holy of Holies.[76] Yeshu knew that the barking of the bronze dogs (some translations read 'lions') at the entrance would make him forget these letters, so he hid a parchment with the sacred letters written upon it inside a cut he had made into his hip. Once he had passed the dogs and their barking had wiped the letters from his memory, he reopened the cut, retrieved the parchment, and so remembered the letters, which he used to perform miracles. Simon Magus likewise 'lost the words with which he was deceiving those who stood by' when a dog with a human voice confronted him.[77]
- Both Justin Martyr[78] and Irenaeus[79] record that a statue had been erected in Rome in honour of Simon Magus, with the inscription *Simoni Deo Sancto*, meaning 'To Simon, the Holy God' (Justin incidentally also states that the followers of Simon Magus claimed to be Christians). Eusebius records that the statue was erected in the river Tiber (i.e., on an island in the river).[80] A statue with the inscription *Semo Sancus Dius Fidus* was indeed found in the 1500s on the Island of Tiber, an island in the river Tiber, where it runs through Rome.[81] This has led scholars to believe that Martyr and Irenaeus must have confused the name of this ancient Roman god with Simon Magus. If such a statue of Simon Magus did however exist, it is unlikely that it would have been erected by followers of Simon Magus but rather by the Romans themselves to display just what the scary little man looked like. According to Irenaeus, Pilate reportedly had a statue ('a likeness' upon which a crown could be placed) of Christ.[82] It is possible that this very statue had been taken to Rome following the defeat of Simon Magus, the Egyptian, by Felix. When Christ was officially accepted as the Saviour by the Roman Catholic Church, this statue would either have been destroyed or locked away, for obvious reasons. For all we know it may still exist, locked away from sight somewhere in the Vatican City.
- In *The Sophia of Jesus Christ*, he (Christ) replies to a question:

> The Holy One said to him: 'I want you to know that First Man is called "Begetter, Self-perfected Mind."' He reflected with **Great Sophia, his consort**, and revealed his first-begotten, androgynous son. His male name is designated 'First Begetter, Son of God,' his female name, '**First Begettress Sophia, Mother of the Universe**.' Some call her 'Love.' Now First-begotten is called 'Christ.' Since he has authority from his father, he created a multitude of angels without number for retinue from Spirit and Light.[83]

Clement records about Simon Magus and his companion called Wisdom (Sophia/Ennoia):

> For after that John the Baptist was killed, as you yourself also know, when **Dositheus** had broached his heresy, **with thirty other chief disciples**, and one woman, who was called Luna…
>
> …But not long after **he fell in love with that woman whom they call Luna**; and he confided all things to us as his friends: how he was a magician, and how he loved Luna, and how, being desirous of glory, he was unwilling to enjoy her ingloriously, but that he was waiting patiently till he could enjoy her honourably; yet so if we also would conspire with him towards the accomplishment of his desires. And he promised that, as a reward of this service, he would cause us to be invested with the highest honours, and we should be believed by men to be gods; 'Only, however, on condition,' says he, 'that you confer the chief place upon me, Simon, who by magic art am able to show many signs and prodigies, by means of which either my glory or our sect may be established.…

> …Therefore, after the death of Dositheus **Simon took Luna to himself**; and with her he still goes about, as you see, deceiving multitudes, and asserting that he himself is a certain power which is above God the Creator, **while Luna**, who is with him, has been brought down from the higher heavens, and that **she is Wisdom**, **the mother of all things**, for whom, says he, the Greeks and barbarians contending, were able in some measure to see an image of her; but of herself, as she is, as the dweller with the first and only God, they were wholly ignorant. Propounding these and other things of the same sort, he has deceived many. But I ought also to state this, which I remember that I myself saw. **Once, when this Luna of his was in a certain tower, a great multitude had assembled to see her, and were standing around the tower on all sides; but she was seen by all the people to lean forward, and to look out through all the windows of that tower**.[84]

There could hardly be a clearer statement regarding the identity of Luna (Sophia) as Mariamne I, who accompanied Christ up to his crucifixion. The description of Luna in the tower can only refer to Mariamne having been locked up in this tower, either during Herod's absence or possibly during the period leading up to her trial and supposed execution. This description of the companion of Christ/Magus as 'the mother of…' also matches the Talmudic reference to Stata Mater, and Mary who accompanied Jesus matches the Luna who went with Simon Magus (see discussion below).

The word *luna* is usually assumed to mean 'the moon,' from Latin.[85] It is unlikely that the Romans would have had much interest in the matrimonial affairs of Herod the Great, which makes it unlikely that the name Luna is of Latin origin. The

Hebrew word *lûwn*[86] means '**to stay permanently; hence, (in a bad sense) to be obstinate (esp. in words, to complain): lodge, murmur**…**remain**,' and *lûwnah* may be a derivation or other form of this word. The word *nâ'*[87] means 'I pray,' 'now,' or 'I beseech thee,' so *Lûwn-nâ'* would mean 'The beseeched obstinate one.' This would be a perfect match of the young Mary (Miryai) who was beseeched by her mother and the Jewish elders to return to her faith (see section 3.1). The Hebrew word *t'lûwnâh*[88] is derived from *lûwn* in the sense of obstinacy and means a 'grumbling' or 'murmuring,' again matching Miryai.

It was stated in the previous section that the Hebrew word for 'standing' can also be interpreted as 'to stay' or 'to remain,' which may in that sense be linked to the word *lûwn* (to stay permanently). 'She who was obstinate' may over time have become '[The mother of] He who was standing.'

In his *Homilies*, Clement does not refer to the woman who accompanied Simon Magus after the death of Dositheus as Luna but as Helena instead:

> But Simon is going about in company with **Helena**, and even till now, as you see, is stirring up the people. And he says that he has brought down **this Helena** from the highest heavens to the world; **being queen, as the all-bearing being, and wisdom**, for whose sake, says he, the Greeks and barbarians fought, having before their eyes but an image of truth; for she, who really is the truth, was then with the chiefest god. Moreover, by cunningly explaining certain things of this sort, **made up from Grecian myths**, he deceives many; especially as he performs many signal marvels, so that if we did not know that he does these things by magic, we ourselves should also have been deceived. But whereas we were his fellow-labourers at the first, so long as he did such

> things without doing wrong to the interests of religion; now that he has madly begun to attempt to deceive those who are religious, we have withdrawn from him.[89]

It would seem that in some aspects Clement confused Mary, the mother of Christ, with Mary Magdalene (Helena). Christ would not have fallen in love with his mother (Luna) but certainly had a romantic relationship with Mary Magdalene. The reference to Helena being a queen can be linked to either Mariamne I (the Virgin Mary) or Mariamne II (Mary Magdalene), both of whom were beautiful queens of Herod the Great.

- Eusebius remarks the following about Simon Magus:

> Justin relates these things, and Irenæus also agrees with him in the first book of his work, *Against Heresies*, where he gives an account of the man and of his profane and impure teaching.…We have understood that Simon was the author of all heresy. From his time down to the present those who have followed his **heresy have feigned the sober philosophy of the Christians**, which is celebrated among all on account of its purity of life. But they nevertheless have embraced again the superstitions of idols, which they seemed to have renounced; **and they fall down before pictures and images of Simon himself and of the above-mentioned Helena who was with him**; and they venture to worship them with incense and sacrifices and libations. But those matters which they keep more secret than these, in regard to which they say that one upon first hearing them would be astonished, and, to use one of the written phrases in vogue among them, would be confounded, are in truth full of amazing things, and of madness and folly, being of such a sort that it is impossible not only to commit

> them to writing, but also for modest men even to utter them with the lips on account of their excessive baseness and lewdness. For whatever could be conceived of, viler than the vilest thing—all that has been outdone by this most abominable sect, which is composed of **those who make a sport of those miserable females that are literally overwhelmed with all kinds of vices**.[90]

The 'miserable women' referred to in this remark by Eusebius match the description given by Josephus[91] of the murderous savage John of Gischala and his followers, who **abused the women of the rich 'as if it were a sport**.' John of Gischala is shown in section 9.2 to be the same person as John, Christ's beloved.

The most compelling evidence linking Simon Magus to Jesus Christ is, however, to be found in the teachings of Simon Magus.

5.3 The Parrot Messiah

Numerous statements made by Simon Magus are practically word for word the same as those made by Christ. These include the following.

- According to Irenaeus, Simon Magus claimed to have appeared in Samaria as **the Father**, in Judea as **the Son**, and amongst the heathen as **the Holy Ghost**.[92] In *The Acts of Peter and Paul*,[93] Simon actually tells Nero, 'Hear, O good emperor: **I am the son of God come down from heaven**.' This was exactly what Jesus Christ claimed to be.[94]
- Like Christ,[95] Simon Magus claimed to have been born of a virgin:

> Do not think that I am a man of your race. I am neither magician, nor lover of Luna, nor son of Antonius. For before my mother Rachel and he came together, **she, still a virgin, conceived me**, while it was in my power to be either small or great, and to appear as a man among men.[96]

- Simon Magus claimed that if he were to be buried alive, he would rise again on the third day.[97] Christ promised that he would rise from the dead after three days.[98] This insane statement could have been made by only one person.
- Simon claimed that he was the Standing One, **who stood, stands, and will stand**,[99] matching Christ's description of himself, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega…**who is, and who was, and who is to come**.'[100] In Greek fragments of *The Gospel of Thomas,* Christ also proclaims, '**I took my stand** in the midst of the world, and in the flesh I appeared to them,'[101] matching Simon Magus's claim that he was the Standing One.
- According to Clement in his *Recognitions*, Simon Magus placed himself above God the Creator.[102] This was exactly what Jesus Christ did, when, as Paul, he claimed that 'by him all things were created…all things were created by him and for him…He is before all things.'[103]
- Christ taught that **the sins of those who believe in him are forgiven, 'who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age**.'[104,105] Simon Magus taught that **those who put their trust in him** and his consort Helen, 'no longer regarded them [the prophets], but, as being free, live as they please; **for men are saved through his** [Simon's] **grace**, and not on account of their own righteous actions.'[106]
- Simon Magus referred to his Helen as the lost sheep, on whose account he had descended to earth.[107-109] Christ likened himself to a shepherd who has lost one of his one hundred sheep and goes looking for it, leaving the other ninety-nine behind.[110] Having found the lost sheep, he is happier about it than the ninety-nine which did not wander off.

- Josephus's infamous Egyptian, who claimed to be a prophet and rebelled against the Romans with thirty thousand followers, declared on the Mount of Olives that **he would break down the walls of Jerusalem**.[111] Jesus Christ frequented the Mount of Olives with his followers and warned that **Jerusalem would be destroyed**,[112] which he obviously planned to do during his uprising.
- Tertullian records of Simon Magus that:

> He had the hardihood to call himself the Supreme Virtue, that is, the Supreme God; and moreover, (to assert) that **the universe had been originated by his angels**; that he had descended in quest of an erring dæmon, which was Wisdom;…After him Menander, his disciple (likewise a magician), saying the same as Simon. Whatever Simon had affirmed himself to be, this did Menander equally affirm himself to be, asserting **that none could possibly have salvation without being baptized in his name**.[113]

Christ created 'all things in heaven and on earth,'[114] he 'laid the foundations of the earth,' and 'the heavens are the work of his hands.'[115] Christ instructed his disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,'[116] exactly as Simon Magus preached baptism in his name.

- In *The Life of Saint Peter the Apostle*,[117] we find probably the most direct testimony to the claims of Simon Magus (the comparison to Christ is given in brackets):

> That time Simon the enchanter was in Jerusalem, and he said he was first truth, and affirmed **that who that**

> **would believe in him he would make them perpetual** [Christ's promise to his followers[118]]. And he also said that **nothing to him was impossible** ['Nothing will be impossible for you'[119]]. It is read in the book of Saint Clement that **he said that he should be worshipped of all men as God** ['for I came from God';[120]…those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'[121]], **and that he might do all that he would** [as Christ links himself to the Father, who can do whatever he wants[122]]. And he said yet more: When my mother Rachel commanded me that I should go reap corn in the field, and saw the sickle ready to reap with, I commanded the sickle to reap by itself alone, and **it reaped ten times more than any other** ['Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than what was sown'[123]]. And yet he added hereto more, after Jerome, and said: **I am the Word of God** ['In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning'[124]], **I am the Holy Ghost** ['baptise…in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost';[125] 'the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one'[126]], **I am Almighty, I am all that is of God** ['The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.'[127]]
>
> …And Peter came to the place where the strife should be, and said to them that were there: Peace to you brethren that love truth. To whom Simon said: **We have no need of thy peace**, for if peace and concord were made, we should not profit to find the truth, for thieves have peace among them. **And therefore desire no peace but battle**, for when two men fight and one is

overcome then is it peace ['Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.'[128]] Then said Peter: Why dreadest thou to hear of peace? Of sins grow battles, where is no sin there is peace; in disputing is truth found, and in works righteousness. Then said Simon: It is not as thou sayest but I shall show to thee the power of my dignity, that anon thou shalt adore me; I am first truth and may flee by the air; I can make new trees] and **turn stones into bread** [Christ multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed thousands[129]]; endure in the fire without hurting; and all that I will I may do. Saint Peter disputed against all these, and disclosed all his malefices.

…After this, our Lord appeared to Saint Peter, saying to him: Simon Magus and Nero purpose against thee, dread thee not, for I am with thee, and shall give to thee the solace of my servant Paul, which to-morn shall come in to Rome.…Then said Simon Magus to Nero: **Because that thou shalt know me to be the very son of God** ['For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son'[130]], command my head to be smitten off **and I shall arise again the third day** ['This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day'[131]]. Then Nero commanded to his brother to smite off his head, and when he supposed to have beheaded Simon, he beheaded a ram. Simon, by his art magic went away unhurt, gathered together the members of the ram, and hid him three days. The blood of the ram abode and congealed. The third day he came and showed him to Nero, saying: Command my blood to be washed away, for lo **I am he that was beheaded, and as I promised I have risen again the third day** [Christ survived his crucifixion[132]]. Whom Nero seeing,

was abashed and bowed verily that he had been the son of God.

To repeat, it is an absurd notion that two different persons could have been present in Judea in the same time frame and physical location and involved with the same group of people, one of whom practically repeated word for word what the other was saying, or had said earlier, and to top it all, claiming to be the other. How could Simon Magus have possessed such intimate knowledge of what Christ had taught his disciples? The only logical conclusion that can be made is that they had to be one and the same person.

Simon Magus is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as having preached in Samaria,[133] while Justin makes him a native of Gitta in Samaria.[134] Josephus mentions a magician called Simon, who was born in Cyprus and who became involved with Felix.[135] It may be argued that the Simon of the Acts of the Apostles and the Simon of Josephus cannot be the same person because of their different places of birth. This is, however, not a valid argument, as Christ appears to have travelled much and may have visited Cyprus, which had been fully Hellenised by the time it was annexed by the Romans in 58 BCE.[136] As claimed in the Talmud and recorded by Clement and Arnobius, Christ (Simon Magus) obtained a 'large measure' of the Greek culture, which he either got from Cyprus or was linked to Cyprus because of his knowledge of the Greeks. Josephus's Simon can be linked to Paul through his connection to Felix and Drusilla (see section 6.1).

5.4 The Miracles of the Lord

Jesus Christ and Simon Magus were both accused by their enemies of practising sorcery. The belief that some individuals possess supernatural powers must have existed since the earliest times, and the miracles of Christ are to this day accepted as fact by the majority of Christians. The early church accepted as fact the miracles performed by the disciples of Christ and also, it seems, the miracles performed by others

like Simon Magus. The explosion of scientific knowledge during the past two centuries has cast serious doubt not only on the miracles supposedly performed by Christ but very specifically on those presently being performed in various religious movements around the world. A miracle in the New Testament is generally understood to be a case where physical matter instantaneously changes from one state to another through the mere command or desire of a person. Such 'miracles' invariably violate the laws of nature and of physics, or in other words, the laws of nature dictate that these events can never happen.

There are only three possible explanations for the 'miracles' performed by Christ, namely:

- They truly were supernatural events.
- The miracles were real events mistakenly perceived to be supernatural, and the witnesses were deceived into believing that a supernatural event had occurred.
- All accounts of miracles by witnesses were invented, and no such events, whether real or perceived as real, ever occurred.

The first and last of these possibilities are rejected in this treatise—the first because it violates the laws of nature and the last because of the prominence of miracles in the ministry of Christ. The second option is well known to modern society through the art of **illusion**, 'a performing art that entertains an audience by staging tricks or creating illusions of seemingly impossible or supernatural feats using purely natural means.'[137]

The following text shows that the miracles of Christ were nothing but a deliberate deception of unsuspecting and gullible individuals or groups of individuals.

The Coin in the Fish

> And when they had come to Capharnaum, they that received the didrachmas, came to Peter, and said to him: Does not your master pay the didrachmas? He said: Yes. And when he had come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying: What is your opinion, Simon? The kings of the earth, of whom do they receive tribute or custom, of their own children, or of strangers? And he said: Of strangers. Jesus said to him: Then the children are free. But that we may not scandalize them, go to the sea, and cast in a hook: and that fish which shall first come up, take: and when you have opened its mouth, you shall find a stater: take that, and give it to them for me and you.[138]

Christ would have instructed Peter to go and catch fish in the presence of numerous witnesses, and no doubt Peter would have taken them along to obey the instruction. When the fish emerged from the water and Peter opened its mouth, he used the very first trick any aspiring illusionist has to master, which is, to make an object appear as if from nowhere.

The Miraculous Fish Catch

> Now when he had ceased to speak, he said to Simon: Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said to him: Master, we have laboured all the night and have taken nothing: but at your word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes: and their net broke. And they beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the ships, so that they were almost sinking.[139]

John places the incident after Christ's crucifixion and at the Sea of Tiberias as opposed to Luke's Lake of Genesareth[140] or Gennesaret,[141]

even though it was the same body of water.[142] The Sea of Tiberias is also known as the Sea of Galilee[143,144] and in the Old Testament as the Sea of Cenereth[145] (or Kinnereth[146-148]). In *The Book of the Maccabees I*, this lake is referred to as Genesar[149] (the *Book of the Maccabees* long predates the Christian era[150]). The name Genesar is generally assumed to mean 'Garden of Riches,'[151] evidently from *gan*,[152] meaning 'a garden' and *'âshar*,[153] meaning 'to grow rich' or *'ôsher*,[154] meaning 'wealth, riches' but presumably changed to *Genesareth* at a later stage.

Although the name Kinnereth may simply have evolved into the phonetically similar Genesareth, another possibility exists. The Hebrew words *genez*[155] (from an unused root meaning to store 'treasure,' or by implication 'a coffer or chest') and *'ar'iyth*[156], meaning 'bottom' combined would yield 'stored at the bottom' or 'the treasure is at the bottom.' This would suggest that the deception of the miraculous fish catch was achieved by suspending underneath the boat a net filled long in advance with live fish or, if the lake was shallow enough, in a net lowered to the bottom of the lake. When Simon Peter cast his net, it was simply allowed to sink to the bottom, after which the net filled with fish was hoisted up, and a 'miracle' was proclaimed. It is possible that once the Jews had figured out how the miracle was accomplished, they jokingly changed 'Chinnereth' to 'Genezariyth,' a name that stuck ever since.

Turning Water into Wine

> And the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus said to him: They have no wine. And Jesus says to her: Woman, what is that to me and to you? My hour is not yet come. His mother says to the waiters: Whatsoever he shall say to you, do. Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. Jesus says to them: Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus says to them: Draw out now and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water: the chief steward calls the bridegroom, and said to him: Every man at first sets forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But you have kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.[157]

A modern illusionist would probably perform this 'miracle' in the following manner. Someone makes a scene about there being no wine left (a planned shortage), ensuring that there are many witnesses to the event. The illusionist then orders what appears to be an arbitrary group of men (in this instance, the waiters) to fill the jars with water in clear view of all the witnesses. On their way to place the jars of water in an agreed location, those who carry the jars momentarily disappear from sight by, for example, moving through a group of people or passing behind an obstruction. The jars containing water are quickly switched for identical jars previously filled with wine. The unsuspecting witnesses hardly notice anything out of the ordinary, and, to their amazement, the water has been turned into wine.

The Raising of Lazarus[158]

The sisters Mary (Magdalene) and Martha sent word to Christ that Lazarus, 'the one he loves,' was sick, but when Christ eventually reached Bethany, their hometown, Lazarus had died and had already been buried for four days. Christ was met by Martha, but Mary 'stayed at home.' He comforted the mourning sisters and was

'deeply moved in spirit and troubled' and wept. Martha took Christ to the tomb, which was opened, and Christ promptly called for the deceased Lazarus to come out from the tomb. Lazarus obliged and emerged from the cave, still wrapped in linen and cloth.

A hint at how Christ managed to 'revive' the deceased Lazarus is given in a text called *The Secret Gospel of Mark*,[159] in which the raising of Lazarus is briefly recounted. Curiously, though, it is stated that 'a great cry was heard from the tomb' **before** Christ and Martha opened the grave. There is, of course, no such thing as the revival of the dead, which leads one to suspect that this miracle must have been yet another of Christ's deceptions.

The 'miracle' was most likely performed as follows: Lazarus either pretended to be sick or more likely was given something to make him appear sick. When he 'died,' he would have been given a drug to prevent him from making involuntary movements while family members and friends came to mourn him. Once he had been buried, he would have left the tomb secretly, and the body of a deceased person would have been placed inside. Just before the arrival of Christ, with much fanfare and numerous witnesses, Lazarus would have slipped into the tomb, waiting for Christ's call to reappear. It would seem, however, that the young man completely underestimated the horror of being locked up in a confined space with a rotting corpse and eventually began screaming to be released. No doubt, both his sisters and Christ would have found Lazarus's predicament hilarious, which probably accounts for Mary not leaving the house to meet Christ, as she must have struggled to control her laughter. Christ is recorded as having wept in sorrow, but one can imagine that he, too, could hardly contain himself, and that he had to clutch his face with both hands to conceal his true emotions. The tears streaming down his face and his shaking body would have been interpreted as intense sorrow by those who were unaware of the deception, but those tears would have been tears of laughter.

All the other instances of Christ reviving deceased persons can likewise be explained. The deceased and his or her family had to be involved in the deception right from the start, either as willing participants or having been paid to do so. Of particular interest is the raising of the deceased son of a widow who lived in Nain.[160] In this instance the dead boy was being carried out of the city in a coffin, presumably to be buried, when Christ encountered the funeral procession. He touched the coffin and instructed the boy to sit up, which he promptly did. There can be no question that the boy had been anything but dead, and that his 'death' must have been well orchestrated to convince friends and family members that he had actually died. A widow in need would have been more than willing to participate in this deception, provided that the compensation was sufficient.

Feeding Thousands

> Which when Jesus had heard, he retired from thence by a boat, into a **desert place** apart, and the multitudes having heard of it, followed him on foot out of the cities. And he coming forth saw a great multitude, and had compassion on them, and healed their sick. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying: This is a **desert place**, and the hour is now past: send away the multitudes, that going into the towns, they may buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said to them, They have no need to go: give you them to eat. They answered him: We have not here, but five loaves, and two fishes. Who said to them: Bring them hither to me. And when he had commanded the multitude to sit down upon the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and broke, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. And they did all eat, and were

filled. And they took up what remained, twelve full baskets of fragments. And the number of them that ate, was **five thousand men**, besides women and children.[161]

And when Jesus had passed away from thence, he came near the Sea of Galilee: and going up into a mountain, he sat there. And there came to him great multitudes, having with them the dumb, the blind, the lame, the maimed, and many others: and they cast them down at his feet, and he healed them: So that the multitudes marvelled seeing the dumb speak, the lame walk, the blind see: and they glorified the God of Israel. And Jesus called together his disciples, and said: I have compassion on the multitudes, because they continue with me now three days, and have not what to eat, and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And the disciples say unto him: **Whence then should we have so many loaves in the desert**, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus said to them: How many loaves have you? But they said: Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down upon the ground. And taking the seven loaves and the fishes, and giving thanks, he broke, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples gave to the people. And they did all eat, and had their fill. And they took up seven baskets full, of what remained of the fragments. And they that ate were **four thousand men**, beside children and women.[162]

Again, the key to this miracle is deception. The loaves were simply concealed from view and then secretly passed on to the disciples, who handed the bread to the masses. There is also a good chance that the feeding of the masses was never intended to be a 'miracle,' and Christ could simply have made provision to feed his followers. They may have interpreted this as another of his miracles. The feeding of

four thousand men in the desert (five thousand according to the other account, but probably based on the same event) matches the accusation brought against Paul, that he was the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert.[163] The feeding of the masses must have been part of the final preparations for the onslaught on Jerusalem.

Walking on Water

And forthwith Jesus obliged his disciples to go up into the boat, and to go before him over the water, till he dismissed the people.

And having dismissed the multitude, he went into a mountain alone to pray. And when it was evening, he was there alone. But the boat in the midst of the sea was tossed with the waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night, **he came to them walking upon the sea. And they seeing him walking upon the sea**, were troubled, saying: It is an apparition. And they cried out for fear. And immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying: Be of good heart: it is I, fear not. And Peter making answer, said: Lord, if it be you, bid me come to you upon the waters. And he said: Come. **And Peter going down out of the boat walked upon the water to come to Jesus**. **But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid: and when he began to sink, he cried out, saying: Lord, save me**. And immediately Jesus stretching forth his hand took hold of him, and said to him: O you of little faith, why did you doubt? And when they had come up into the boat, the wind ceased.[164]

If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well. As all the miracles of Christ required extensive preparation, it would be advantageous to

perform as many miracles as possible at one venue. Those who were astonished by the multitude of loaves would now be treated to yet another miracle—Christ walking on water. In calm, shallow waters it would have been possible to walk on stepping stones laid just below the surface of the water, leading up to a previously determined point of rendezvous with Peter's boat. Dusk would have been chosen to prevent the stepping stones from being spotted by the witnesses, and Christ would have been dressed in white to make him clearly visible. Peter also attempted the walk-on-water miracle but missed one of the stones and ended up in the water. No doubt the critics of Christ would have seen through the deception, and his followers subsequently had to introduce a raging storm and the subsequent calming of the sea **after** the walk on the water in an attempt to refute their allegations.

A second possibility is that a relatively large raft constructed of heavy logs may have been used to slowly pull Christ towards the anchored boat. Christ, being no taller than a child, would have been able to stand upright on this raft, creating the illusion that he was 'walking' on water. As with the stepping stones, the sea would have had to be calm, and the miracle would have had to be performed at dusk or at night, lest the raft and tow rope be spotted.

The Cursed Fig Tree

Christ supposedly cursed a fig tree which did not have any fruit, and it withered the next day:

> And the next day when they came out from Bethania, he was hungry. And when he had seen afar off a fig tree having leaves, he came, if perhaps he might find anything on it. And when he had come to it, he found nothing but leaves. For it was not the time for figs. And answering he said to it: May no man hereafter eat fruit of you any more for ever! And his disciples heard it.…And when they passed by in the [next] morning they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter remembering, said to him: Rabbi, behold the fig tree which you cursed is withered away.[165]

In the modern era, there are numerous poisonous liquids that can be used to kill plants, including trees. The root system can simply be soaked in this poison, which after a while would take effect and cause the tree to wither and die. If such a poison had been available two thousand years ago, a couple of experiments would have revealed how soon after the poison being applied the tree would show visible signs of withering. It is also possible that the root system of the fig tree had been dug open and damaged sufficiently to cause withering before Christ just happened to pass by and curse it. It is highly unlikely that it all happened within one day (Matthew actually has the tree withering away immediately[166]). Christ would have ensured that he passed the same tree he had cursed in the presence of several witnesses after sufficient time had been allowed for the tree to wither and die.

Faith Healing

Probably the most controversial aspect of modern Christianity, the healing of various illnesses and diseases through faith, has changed little since the miracles performed by Christ. It is as impossible today as it was back then, and the only logical explanation once more is deception. Those who are supposedly blind, lame, or deaf or who suffer extreme pain only need to lie for the miracle to be accomplished, but the healing of physical deformity and disability can practically only be achieved by making use of twins, one of which is afflicted. Such a pair would have been invaluable to any travelling magician in the time of Christ. There may be several reasons why anyone would participate in such fraud, but the two most prominent are: first, most likely to deliberately promote the cause of the 'healer' by his team,

and second, doing so for money when outsiders are involved. That Christ as Simon Magus offered people money in exchange for 'magic' is attested to by the story in which he offered the disciples money in return for the magical powers they possessed:

> And when Simon [Magus] saw that, by the imposition of the hands of the apostles, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying: Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I shall lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him: Keep your money to yourself, to perish with you: because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.[167]

As with all the other Christian texts involving Simon Magus, the author of the Acts of the Apostles here attempts to distance Christ from his alternate persona, Simon Magus. The success of Christ's miracles can be attributed mainly to two factors, namely: gullible believers and preparation, which is all it takes to perform a miracle.

6

Jesus and Paul

> [Christ]…a man of simple appearance, mature age, dark skin, small stature, three cubits high, hunchbacked, with a long face, long nose, and meeting eyebrows, so that they who see him might be affrighted.
>
> —*The Halosis* of Josephus

> [Paul]…a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.
>
> —*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*

> Paul…the man of three cubits.
>
> —Pseudo-Chrysostom

There can be little doubt that Christ survived his crucifixion, but a key question that remains is what became of him after that event. Would he willingly have gone through such a horrific ordeal, only to disappear into oblivion? Would he have done so only for his name to live forever? The answer must be a definitive 'certainly not!'

According to the Acts of the Apostles,[1] a young man named Saul used to persecute the followers of Christ but was confronted by the risen Christ, was converted, and his name changed to Paul. As related earlier, Paul's conversion was recorded as having happened in the same year as Christ's crucifixion. In this section it will be shown that Christ, who officially was supposed to be in heaven following his crucifixion and resurrection, continued as leader of his resistance movement, having assumed the identity of Paul.

It was argued in the preceding chapter that Jesus Christ and Simon Magus were one and the same person. Some scholars have, however, recognised that Simon Magus and Saint Paul of Tarsus must have been the same person, for example, as concluded by Detering based on several common aspects of their personalities, as well as two specific events in their lives:[2]

- Simon and Paul were both in Rome during the reign of Claudius (41–54 CE),

and most significantly, the link that exists between Marcion of Sinope (a bishop of the early church who died ca. 160 CE and was excommunicated by the Church Fathers for some of his views),[3] and Simon Magus:

- 'Marcion explicitly appeals to Paul (as his spiritual father), although the Fathers of the Church emphatically stick to the opinion that Marcion is connected with Simon Magus through the heretic Kerdo, i.e., that he comes from the school of Simon the Magus, whom again Marcion mentions nowhere.'

There is ample evidence to be found for identifying Simon Magus with Paul of Tarsus and the latter with Christ.

6.1 The Physical Descriptions of Jesus and Paul

The Bible makes no mention of the physical appearance of Christ, which is rather odd, given that he was the Saviour of the human race. What little information we have comes mainly from remarks by the early Church Fathers.

Of Jesus—

- According to Hierosolymitanus, as well as John of Damascus,[4] 'the Jew Josephus' recorded that Christ 'was seen having connate eyebrows, goodly eyes, long-faced, crooked, well-grown.'

- Nicephorus Callistus also claims that Josephus had described Christ as 'He was full seven spans (high), with beautiful eyes, a long nose, tawny hair, black eyebrows, his neck gently bent so that the carriage of his body was not quite upright and rigid.'[5] In ancient times a span was understood to be half a cubit, a cubit being the length of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. This measure was by its very nature not fixed, but the Hebrew cubit was assumed to be 44.6 cm in length,[6] which would make Christ 3.5 cubits or 1.56 m (5 feet 1.5 inches) tall.
- In the *Letter of Lentulus*, Christ is described as being of *statura mediocris*, meaning 'of medium height':

> Lentulus, the Governor of the Jerusalemites to the Roman Senate and People, greetings. There has appeared in our times, and there still lives, a man of great power (virtue), called Jesus Christ. The people call him prophet of truth; his disciples, son of God. He raises the dead, and heals infirmities. He is a man of **medium size (*statura procerus, mediocris et spectabilis*)**; he has a venerable aspect, and **his beholders can both fear** and love him. His hair is of the colour of the ripe hazel-nut, straight down to the ears, but below the ears wavy and curled, with a bluish and bright reflection, flowing over his shoulders. It is parted in two on the top of the head, after the pattern of the Nazarenes. His brow is smooth and very cheerful with a face without wrinkle or spot, embellished by **a slightly reddish complexion.** His nose and mouth are faultless. His beard is abundant, of the colour of his hair, not long, but divided at the chin. His aspect is simple and **mature**, his eyes are changeable and bright. **He is terrible in his reprimands**, sweet and amiable in his admonitions, cheerful without loss of gravity. **He was never known to laugh**, but often to weep. His stature is straight, his hands

> and arms beautiful to behold. His conversation is grave, infrequent, and modest. He is the most beautiful among the children of men.[7,8]

This letter was first published in *Life of Christ* by Ludolph the Carthusian (Cologne, 1474 CE) and was supposedly written by one Publius Lentulus, who is believed to be a fictitious person who was said to have been Governor of Judea before Pontius, and to have written a letter to the Roman Senate concerning Christ. Despite its late publication and whether it was a forgery or not, the letter must have originated from somewhere and most likely long before 1471 CE. In the letter it is, for instance, also recorded that Christ was of 'mature' or elderly age, which matches the statement of the Jews that Christ was not yet fifty at that time (see section 4.3). Several of the physical attributes of Christ are listed in other authentic records dated to much earlier times.

It should be noted that Josephus mentions a Lucius Lentulus, who was one of the consuls who pardoned the Jews from military service after the death of Caesar:

> In the presence of these it was that Lentulus pronounced this decree: I have before the tribunal dismissed those Jews that are Roman citizens, and are accustomed to observe the sacred rites of the Jews at Ephesus, on account of the superstition they are under.[9]

This Lentulus is mentioned in the same setting as Menander (a follower of Simon Magus) as related earlier and could possibly be the source of this letter, had he become involved in one way or another with Christ. He would most likely have known Dositheus, the former friend of Hyrcanus II. Whether he would have written this letter is doubtful, but early Christians would

have recognised the value of citing such an influential name as a supporter of Christ.

- In a letter of certain bishops to the Emperor Theophilus,[10] Christ's height is described by the epithet *tripechus*[11] (three cubits) which translates to a height of 1.34 m (4 feet 4.7 inches), if the standard cubit is used. Eisler uses an ell or cubit (originally the same unit) equal to a foot and a half, which renders Christ's height as 1.37 meters (54 inches, or 4 feet 6 inches).[12] Tertullian, Celsus, and the *Acta Johannis Leucii* all agree that Christ was below medium height.
- Ephrem Syrus (320–379 CE) describes Christ as:

  > God took human form and appeared in the form of **three human ells**; he came down to us small of stature.[13]

- Theodore of Mopsuhestia likewise records that:

  > Thy appearance, O Christ, was smaller than that of the children of Jacob.[14]

- Tertullian records the following about Christ:

  > Let us compare with Scripture the rest of His dispensation. **Whatever that poor despised body may be, because it was an object of touch and sight**, it shall be my Christ, **be He inglorious, be He ignoble**, be He dishonoured; for such was it announced that He should be, **both in bodily condition and aspect**. Isaiah comes to our help again.…According to the same prophet, however, **He is in bodily condition 'a very worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and an outcast of the people.'**[15]

Tertullian refers to Isaiah's famous prophecy of the Messiah to come (quoted in section 4.4), which may create the impression that he falsely described Christ as being of unsightly appearance simply to fulfil this prophecy. The manner in which he describes Christ, however, suggests that his description was indeed accurate. Christ's appearance may in fact have been one of the main reasons why some accepted him as the Messiah, as Isaiah had predicted that their saviour would be ugly in appearance.

In his work *On the Flesh of Christ*, Tertullian confirms the unsightly appearance of Christ:

> As when they said, Whence has this man this wisdom and these mighty works? Thus spoke even **they who despised His outward form. His body did not reach even to human beauty**, to say nothing of heavenly glory. Had the prophets given us no information whatever **concerning His ignoble appearance**, His very sufferings and the very contumely He endured bespeak it all.[16]

- According to Irenaeus, Christ was described as weak, unattractive, and afflicted:

> Some of them, moreover—[when they predicted that] as a weak and inglorious man, and as one who knew what it was to bear infirmity[17]

When a person was condemned to be crucified in ancient times, he was not forced to carry the whole cross, which could weigh over 300 pounds (136 kg), but typically only the crossbeam of 75 to 125 pounds (34 to 57 kg).[18] The synoptic Gospels record that a man called Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Christ's cross,[19] although John has Christ carrying his own cross.[20] It may very well be that Christ was initially forced to carry his own cross

but was too weak to do so, possibly because of the flogging but more likely because he was of such small and weak stature. His cross, presumably the crossbeam only, had to be carried by another person. Incidentally, in *The Epistle of Barnabas*, the cross on which Christ was crucified is described as being T-shaped:

> And because the cross was to express the grace [of our redemption] by the letter T, he says also, 'Three Hundred.' He signifies, therefore, Jesus by two letters, and the cross by one.[21]

The upright beam of the cross would probably have been located at the place of crucifixion. Upon arrival the condemned man would be stripped and tied or nailed to the crossbeam, which would then be attached to the upright beam.

- Christ anticipated that he would be taunted—'Physician, heal yourself'[22] —and at his crucifixion he was indeed taunted that while he saved others, he could not save himself.[23] The statement about the physician healing himself suggests that Christ had to be healed, or in other words, he had a physical affliction or deformity of some kind.
- Celsus describes the physique of Christ as 'little (small), ill-favoured (ugly, hideous), and ignoble (shameful, dishonourable, mean).'[24]
- In the Syrian *Acts of Thomas*, the apostle constantly appears as the twin of Christ, and he instructs the people:

> If you do not raise yourselves up, you cannot see me, who am little.[25]

This matches Zaccheus having to climb a fig tree to be able to see Christ who was being dwarfed by his followers.[26]

- In the *Halosis* by Josephus (as reconstructed by Eisler), Christ is described as:

> Both his nature and his form were human; for he was a man of simple appearance, **mature age**, dark skin, **short growth**, **three cubits tall**, **hunchbacked**, with a long face, a long nose, and eyebrows meeting above the nose, **so that the spectators could take fright**, **with scanty hair** (but) having a line in the middle of the head after the fashion of the Nazireans, and with an undeveloped beard.[27]

As argued earlier, Josephus must have known Christ personally but referred to him as 'the Egyptian,' which was how he was known amongst the Jews. Eisler translates Christ's complexion as 'dark skin' instead of ruddy or reddish, but Bennet[28] notes that in the *hadith* (sayings) of Muhammad, Christ is referred to **as red-faced** and of medium height, matching the accounts given above.

- Christ seemed to have been acutely aware of his height:

> Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?[29,30]

- Chrysostom remarks about Christ:

> Do you see how He plucks up by the root the spirit of arrogance; how He heals the ulcer of vainglory,[31]

and then curiously mentions an arrogant, short man,

> For like as, if any one, **being three cubits in stature**, were to strive to be higher than the mountains, or actually

> to think it, and draw himself up, as overpassing their summits, we should seek no other proof of his being out of his senses; so also when thou seest a man arrogant, and thinking himself superior to all, and accounting it a degradation to live with other people, seek not thou after that to see any other proof of that man's madness.

It would seem that Chrysostom was here referring to a specific person, which may have been either Christ as perceived by his enemies, or Simon Magus, the villain of early Christianity.

- According to Andrew of Crete, **Christ was bent or even crooked**, and **well grown**,[32] and he also recorded that Mary, the mother of Christ, was no more than three ells tall.[33] If Joseph was also of small stature, it would explain why Christ had truly been a diminutive man.
- In *The Acts of Peter*, we read:

> Him [Christ] who is great and quite small, comely and ugly: **small for the ignorant**, great to those who know him, comely to the understanding and **ugly to the ignorant**, youthful and aged…glorious but amongst us **appearing lowly and ill-favoured**.[34]

- According to *The Acts of John*, John wrote of Christ:

> He (Christ) appeared to me again **as rather bald-headed** but with a thick flowing beard.…But he sometimes appeared to me as **a small man with no good looks**[35]

- Saint Augustine states that Christ 'appeared ugly (*foedus*, meaning 'horrible, abominable'[36]) to his persecutors.'[37,38]
- Tertullian, denying that the appearance of Christ had any beauty, goes as far as stating that:

> The ignominy of the face (of Jesus) would roar (as a witness against the heretics) if it could.[39]

The unflattering descriptions of Christ listed above are in agreement with the Mandaean and Gnostic descriptions of Christ as 'something that was created in the womb of Mary' and an 'amorphous substance' that Sophia had given birth to, causing her to grieve at the sight of its imperfection.

Of Paul—

- In *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, as recorded in *The Acts of Paul*, Paul is described as:

> A man of **small stature**, with a **bald head** and **crooked legs**, in a **good state of body**, with **eyebrows meeting** and nose somewhat hooked.[40]

This description matches those of Christ, including that of Andrew of Crete. Other translations of this passage describe him as having had hollow eyes.[41] According to Eisler, who studied several manuscripts of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul was originally described as:

> Quite small, bald-headed, bow-legged, with knees far apart, with meeting eyebrows, large eyes, a long nose and a red, florid face,[42]

and he notes that both Christ and Paul were recorded as being hunchbacked and well grown.[43]

- Pseudo-Chrysostom furthermore describes Paul as the '**the man of three cubits,**'[44] which matches the description of Christ in Josephus's *Halosis*.
- Paul admitted that he bore the marks (Greek *stigmata*) of Christ on his body.[45] The word *stigmata* is the plural form of *stigma,*[46]

which refers to a mark incised or punched (for recognition of ownership) and actually denotes 'a tattooed mark' or 'a mark burnt in, a brand.' Although the *stigmata* in Galatians is usually interpreted as referring to the physical scarring Paul suffered following his conversion to Christianity, it more likely refers to the tattoos Christ had on his body as recorded in the Talmud.[47]

- No doubt, Christians later attempted to refute the objectionable descriptions of Paul, as, for example, recorded in *The History of the Contending of Saint Paul*, where Paul is described as (my comments in brackets):

> a vigorous man of fine, upright stature [i.e., not crooked, as rumoured], and **his countenance was ruddy with the ruddiness of the skin of a pomegranate**, his complexion was clear, his nose was high and large [not hooked, as rumoured], his eyes were dark [not hollow, as rumoured], and his cheeks were full, and bearded, and of the colour of a rose.[48]

The author of this document apparently felt obliged to correct the image of Paul as having had a misshapen body but had no qualms about admitting that Paul was reddish in complexion, as Christ was recorded to have been.

- A description of Paul as recorded in *The Passion of Paul* reads:

> And he was easily recognizable, having a crooked body, a black beard and a bald head.[49]

- When Paul supposedly raised the deceased son of the Emperor as described in *The Acts of Saint Peter,*[50] the 'revived' son told his father that he had seen men standing before the throne of God,

petitioning on his behalf. With them 'there was another man whose petition was bold, **whose head was bald and shining, whose hair was red, and whose appearance was like unto that of Paul**.' The person who supposedly intercedes before God on behalf of the sinners is of course Jesus Christ himself.

Eisler recognises the resemblance between Christ and Paul:

> A glance at the personal description of Paul already given shows at once that the tradition has come down to us in a form exactly corresponding to the one found in the iconismus (imagery) of Jesus,…This resemblance of Paul to Jesus.[51]

However, despite a lengthy rationalisation, he fails to consider the most logical of conclusions, that Christ and Paul of Tarsus must have been one and the same person. Apart from their physical likenesses, there are several other pieces of circumstantial evidence linking Christ to Paul:

- In the previous section, it was shown that Christ and Simon Magus were the same person, and as stated at the beginning of this section, several scholars have identified Simon Magus with Paul, meaning that Christ and Paul were the same person.
- In the Acts of the Apostles,[52] Paul is unequivocally accused of being the Egyptian who had started a revolt and had led four thousand assassins (Latin, *sicarii*,[53] also translated as 'murderers,' Greek *sikarios*,[54] meaning 'dagger-men') into the desert some years before. It is shown in section 9.1 that Simon Peter was none other than Simon bar Gioras, the leader of a group called the *sicarii*. The accusation levelled against Paul, therefore, identifies Jesus Christ, under his assumed identity of Paul, as the true leader of this group.

- A remark in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, that Thecla '**saw the Lord sitting in the form of Paul**,' suggests that they were indeed the same person. In *The Acts of Saint Peter*,[55] John and Peter have doubts about Paul:

  > And I, Peter, held converse with my brother John secretly, for we were marvelling at the act of Paul, and wondering **whether Simon the magician** (having heard the rumour of us) **had appeared unto us in the form of Paul**…

  This remark in turn suggests that Simon Magus and Paul were the same person, thereby linking Simon Magus to Christ through Paul.
- Paul was arrested when he was recognised at the temple in Jerusalem.[56] A crowd soon gathered, and he was accused of being 'the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place,' who had brought Greeks into the temple area and had defiled that holy place. The teachings of Paul match those of Christ, but more specifically, Christ was recorded as storming the temple, driving out everyone inside, and kicking over the tables of the money changers.[57] He could not have done so all by himself, particularly given his small physical stature. He would no doubt have been accompanied by his followers, who consisted mostly of those rejected by the Jews, broadly referred to as 'Greeks' (see 'The cleansing of the temple' in section 6.2). How often did anyone succeed in defiling the Holy Temple? There could have been only one such event, the one perpetrated by Christ/Paul.

Although the New Testament portrays Paul as a mild-mannered, peaceful preacher of a new religion, the circumstances of his arrest suggest the very opposite. When the Jews recognised and seized him, 'the whole city was aroused, and people

came running from all directions," and he was about to be killed when Roman troops intervened and saved him from the 'mob.' Such was the uproar amongst the Jews that the Roman commander could not hear the accusations against Paul above the noise, and Paul had to be carried away by soldiers because of the 'great violence of the mob.'[58] A detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen had to accompany Paul for protection, at night, when he was transported from Jerusalem to be delivered to Felix (the Roman procurator of Judea from 52 to 58 CE).[59] The presence of such a large contingent of Roman soldiers confirms that this man must have been of particular interest to the Romans and probably to Felix himself. The accusation brought against Paul by the Jews was that he was the Egyptian who had started a revolt and led four thousand *sicarii* into the desert. In other words, Paul was the very 'Egyptian' whose forces had been defeated by Felix (see section 5.2) but who had eluded capture. Felix would have had a huge interest in the capture of the leader of those who rebelled against the Romans in Israel.

- Further proof is provided by Paul's trial before Felix, in which he (Paul) was accused of being a troublemaker (literally a pestilence) who stirred up riots.[60] It is specifically recorded that Felix, who was accompanied by his wife Drusilla, had frequently sent for Paul to talk to him, supposedly about his faith.[61] Josephus records a similar event:

> But for the marriage of Drusilla with Azizus, in was in no long time afterward dissolved upon the following occasion: While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty; **and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon, one of his friends; a Jew he was, and by birth a Cypriot, and one who pretended to be a magician**, and tried to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry him; and promised, that if she should not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman. Accordingly she acted badly…[and married Felix].[62]

Felix and Drusilla are therefore linked to Simon Magus by Josephus, and in a similar manner, Paul is linked to Felix and Drusilla in the Acts of the Apostles. Maier states that this Simon Magus and the one of legend could not possibly be the same person, as their places of birth were reportedly different.[63] This is, however, a feeble argument, as the chance of two persons called Simon Magus being active in Israel at the same time is practically nil. There would have been much speculation about his origins, and various places would accordingly have been suggested.

Simon Magus would not have been a 'friend' of Felix. Felix held this infamous little creature captive in his own quarters for two years,[64] most likely for his own amusement and to display him to his visitors. He most likely sent Simon to Drusilla as a favour and to impress her, as she must have been curious to see this little man in real life.

- It is probably more than coincidence that the first mention in the Acts of the Apostles of Saul, the name of Paul before his conversion,[65] is followed by an account of Peter and John clashing with Simon Magus.[66] The two events may have been grouped together intentionally in order to counter rumours that Paul and Simon Magus were the same person.
- In the Gnostic text called the *Pistis Sophia*, it is stated in the first paragraph that **Christ continued to teach his disciples for eleven years after his resurrection**.[67] This certainly does not match what is suggested by the New Testament account that

Christ departed to heaven shortly after his resurrection. This person could, therefore, only have been 'Paul.'

- In a passage in the *Pistis Sophia*, probably compiled long after the actual events, Mary Magdalene addresses Christ as follows:

> Concerning this word, my **Lord, thou hast spoken aforetime through the mouth of our brother Paul**: 'Give tax to whom tax is due, give fear to whom fear is due, give tribute to whom tribute is due, give honour to whom honour is due, and give laud to whom laud is due, and owe not any other anything.'[68]

This statement evidently refers to Paul's letter to the Romans,[69] in which he advocates submission to the state (authorities). These words were indeed the words of Jesus Christ himself.[70] The reference to Paul's letter indicates either that the *Pistis Sophia* was written after Paul's letter had become public knowledge, or Paul was confused with Christ by whoever wrote the *Pistis Sophia*. Or perhaps the translation should simply read, 'Lord, you have spoken as Paul.' In fact, the sect called the Cathars maintained that '**Jesus was not ever in this world except spiritually in the body of Paul**.'[71]

- Paul confessed to having killed many people, supposedly as a persecutor of the followers of Christ. As Saul, he searched from house to house, entered, and dragged off men and women (to prison).[72] He must certainly have been in a position of power to be able to do such deeds; otherwise, he would have been arrested by the authorities. This statement, however, perfectly matches the actions of John of Gischala and Simon bar Gioras, who searched the houses of the leaders and of the rich in the cities they attacked for women and possessions. Paul 'breathed out murderous threats against the disciples of Christ,'[73] and

confessed that he had condemned many of them to death.[74] It was Christ who condemned the rich to terrible deaths.

- Paul's death is not described in the Acts of the Apostles, although his capture is. He was sent to Rome, an 'honour' which befell only the most notorious enemies of the Roman state. According to *The Acts of Paul*[75] and *The Martyrdom of Saint Paul*,[76] he was beheaded upon Nero's orders. In *The Martyrdom of Saint Peter*,[77] it is claimed that Peter tried to leave Rome in disguise, but he met Christ entering Rome through the city gates. When Peter asked his Lord where he was going, **Christ replied that he was going to the city of Rome to be crucified again**. Peter then went back into the city again, where he was captured and crucified (his death in Rome actually occurred years later, following the siege and conquest of Jerusalem), after which Nero hunted down all those who were instructed by Peter. As will be shown later, **the burning of Rome in July of 64 CE was an act of revenge by Peter and his followers, for the death of their master, Jesus Christ** (see section 7.6). What is of significance here, though, is that Christ was seen going to (being taken to) Rome to be crucified (executed) again. This supports the argument that Christ and Paul were one and the same person.
- Of particular interest is Paul's claim that he had trained at the feet of Gamaliel,[78] who died twenty-two years after Christ,[79] traditionally placed around 55 CE but ca. 43 CE if Christ had been crucified in 21 CE.

A peculiar story told of Gamaliel in the Talmud reads:

> As R. Gamaliel sat and lectured, Woman is destined to bear every day, for it is said, the woman conceived and beareth simultaneously. **But a certain disciple scoffed at him, quoting, 'there is no new thing under the sun.'** Come, and I will show you its equal in this world, he replied. He went forth and showed him a fowl. On another

> occasion R. Gamaliel sat and lectured, Trees are destined to yield fruit every day, for it is said, and it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit: just as the boughs [exist] every day, so shall there be fruit every day. **But a certain disciple scoffed at him, saying, but it is written, 'there is no new thing under the sun!**' Come, and I will show you its equal in this world, replied he. He went forth and showed him the caper bush. On another occasion R. Gamaliel sat and expounded, Israel is destined to bring forth cakes and wool robes, for it is said, There shall be an handful of corn in the land. **But a certain disciple scoffed at him, quoting, 'there is no new thing under the sun!'** 'Come, and I will show you their equal in this world,' replied he. He went forth and showed him morels and truffles; and for silk robes [he showed him] the bark of a young palm-shoot.[80]

The quote by 'a certain disciple' comes from Ecclesiastes,[81] and the manner in which the disciple is referred to is reminiscent of the enforced sanitisation of the Talmud with respect to the name of Christ ('a certain person').[82] In other words, it appears to have been Christ who 'trained at the feet' of Gamaliel. It would seem that Christ, upon his return to Israel following the death of Herod the Great, became a 'disciple' of all the leading religious teachers at that time, no doubt to familiarise himself with the opposition. These teachers included John the Baptist and Gamaliel.

- Epiphanius records a heresy called *The Ascension of Paul*, by the Cainites:

> But again, others forge a brief work in the name of the apostle Paul, **full of unspeakable abominations**, which the so-called Gnostics also use, (and) which they call **an Ascension of Paul**—taking their cue from the apostle's statement that he has ascended to the third heaven and heard ineffable words, which man may not speak. And these, they say, are the ineffable words.[83]

This passage not only links Paul to unspeakable deeds but also to Christ, who had supposedly ascended to heaven following his 'resurrection.' The 'unspeakable abominations' were usually attributed to Simon Magus in early Christian literature.

- Finally, if Paul and Christ were the same person, why would Christ have chosen the aliases Saul and Paul? Saul was the legendary king of the Hebrews who was deposed by David, and it is possible that Christ, as the legitimate Hasmonean heir to the throne, portrayed himself as a divine-selected future king, similar to Saul and David, from whose bloodline the Messiah was to come.[84] The name Saul (*Shâ'ûwl*[85] in Hebrew) is usually interpreted as 'asked,' but an alternative meaning can be found in a combination of Hebrew words phonetically similar to *Shâ'ûwl*. The word *shâ'âh*[86] means 'to desolate; lay waste,' and *'ûwl*[87] means 'be strong, powerful,' which combined yields 'to lay waste the powerful.' The powerful in Israel would invariably have been the rich, and Christ's resentment of the rich is well recorded in the New Testament.[88] Not recorded is the terror campaign he and his followers led against the rulers of the villages and towns who chose to cooperate with the Romans (see chapters 9 and 10). He indeed 'laid them waste.'

In the Acts of the Apostles, the name change of Saul to Paul is simply recorded as 'Saul, who was also called Paul.' The name Paul is usually assumed to be of Latin origin, from *paulus*,[89] meaning 'small' or 'little.' This appellation would make sense in terms of the physical descriptions of Christ and Paul presented above, but the names 'Saul' and 'Paul' are mentioned in a manner which suggests that the names may have a common

origin. The Hebrew word *pâ'âh*[90] means 'to blow away,' or 'to scatter into corners.' The interpretation of *Pâ'âh 'ûwl* is therefore similar to that of *Shâ'âh 'ûwl*, as may be expected. Christ was 'the destroyer of the powerful.'

An alternative, though less likely origin of the name Paul can be derived from the Hebrew word *pâlâ'*,[91] which is pronounced *paw-law* and as a verb means 'to be marvellous' or 'to do wonderful acts.' The word *pele'*[92] means 'a miracle,' suggesting that the name Paul actually means 'miracle worker,' an apt description of Christ. By implication, Paul would also mean 'magician,' which would identify Paul as being Simon Magus, the legendary opponent of Simon Peter.

- During the first centuries of the Christian Era, the only attempt to explain the meaning of the names Saul and Paul appears to have been recorded in *The History of the Contending of Saint Paul*':

> Now the kinsfolk of Paul called his name 'Saul,' which is a Hebrew name, and the interpretation of which is 'given,' that is to say, it is well known that God 'gave' him;…Now the name 'Paul' is interpreted as meaning 'guide to the faith.'[93]

It would appear that the author of this text was vaguely familiar with the traditional interpretation of the name Saul ('ask' is contextually closely related to 'give'), but it is not clear why he would have interpreted Paul as 'guide to the faith.'

6.2 The Donkey King of the Jews

Paul's conversion, during which he saw a light, fell to the ground, and was temporarily blinded,[94] hints at the possibility that he had been thrown off a horse and suffered a concussion. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul (then still referred to as Saul) was on his way to Damascus when a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him,

upon which Saul fell to the ground and heard the voice of the Lord calling him. Those who were with him stood speechless, as they had heard the sound but had not seen anyone. Christ instructed Saul to no longer persecute him, after which Saul got up from the ground but could not see. He remained blind for three days.

This description of Saul's conversion creates the impression that Saul was walking and merely fell to the ground, as in lying down, probably in fear of the light and sound of the apparition of Christ. In Paul's later defence of himself, he claimed that both he and his companions had all fallen to the ground.[95] This was, however, not the case.

In *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, we find the following description of the event:

> That is of Paul in whom the conversion was made.…that **he was beaten to the earth**, he was blind and fasted three days, and **was smitten down to the ground** for to be raised.…And Saint Austin saith that **he was smitten down for to be blind**, for to be changed…And yet saith Saint Austin, he that was out of the faith **was hurt** for to be made believe.[96]

This description of his conversion confirms that he was thrown violently to the ground and was hurt, which could only have happened had he been thrown off an animal he was travelling on. That Paul had fallen from a horse is corroborated by an Arab tradition, which relates that **Paul had a horse called Eagle, which he hocked and then repented**,[97] suggesting that had fallen from a lame animal.

Incidentally, Caravaggio (1571–1610 CE)[98] had been commissioned to create a painting of Paul's conversion (figure 6.1), which depicted Paul as having been thrown off a horse. It was initially rejected but later accepted despite claims that it placed greater emphasis on the horse's haunches than on Paul himself.[99]

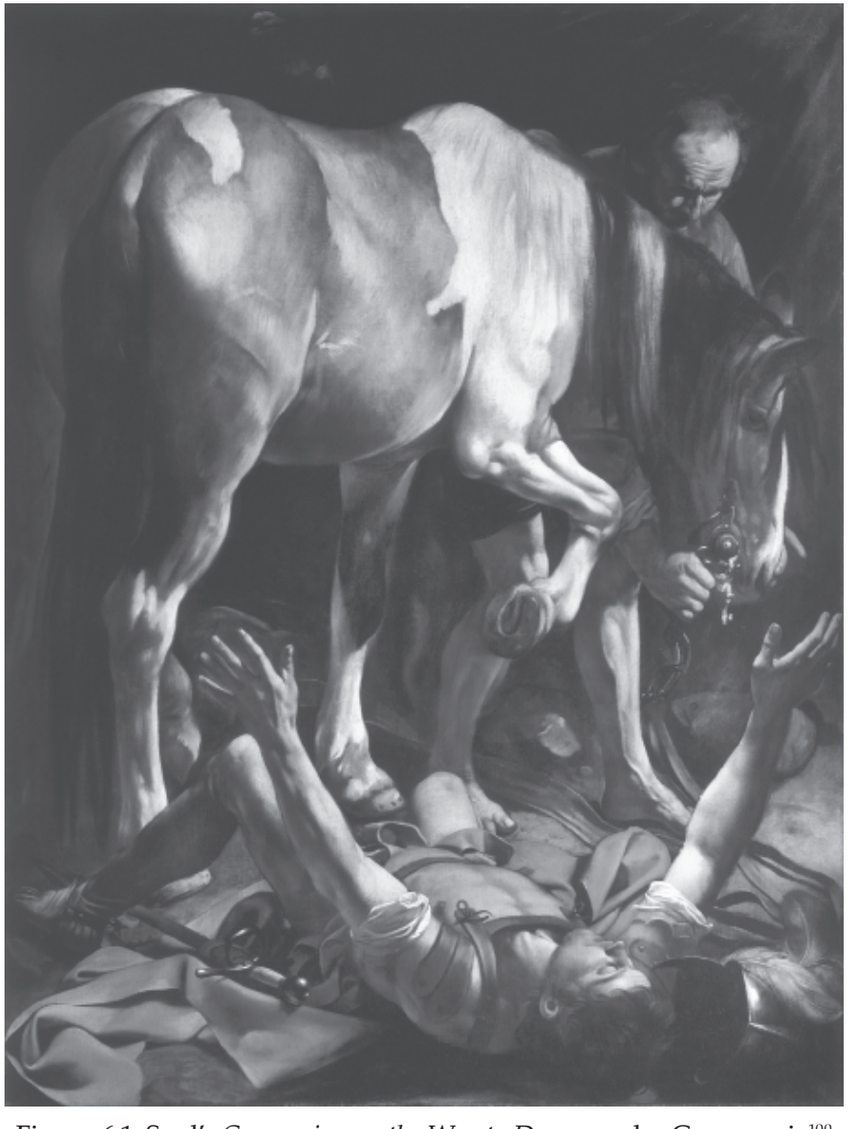

Figure 6.1. Saul's *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* by Caravaggio[100]

If Christ and Paul were one and the same person as argued above, one would expect a similar incident to be found in the life of Christ.

Christ Enters Jerusalem on an Untamed Donkey

Christ demanded to ride a colt that had never been ridden before on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.[101] Any wild animal would have attempted to throw him off, which is indeed what seems to have happened. The New Testament accounts on what happened after the triumphal entry differ and in fact suggest that there was a delay of at least a day if not longer before Christ eventually stormed and 'cleansed' Jerusalem's temple.

In *The Acts of Saint Thomas in India*,[102] the apostle Thomas encounters a talkative colt, who informs him that he was a descendant of the colt on which the Lord had entered Jerusalem and subsequently offered him (Thomas) a ride into town. Though unwilling at first, Thomas eventually agreed to participate in this apparent reenactment of the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. **When they arrived at the city gates, he [Thomas] 'threw himself off him [the colt]' and commanded the colt to proceed on his own. The colt immediately fell down before him and died, and all those who saw it were terrified**.

This must have been the feeble excuse Christ's followers used to explain why he had been thrown off the donkey, suffering severe concussion and temporary blindness, in response to the public ridicule Christ suffered afterwards. The mention of the bystanders in Thomas's encounter with the talkative colt being 'terrified' matches Paul's companions being 'speechless.' One can hardly imagine the anxiety and embarrassment of Christ's followers when, instead of hailing him as the king of the Jews as he entered Jerusalem, they found their master lying unconscious on the ground.

It may very well be that Christ had hoped to enter Jerusalem exactly as the Messiah was supposed to do[103] but became the laughing stock of the Jews instead. His supposed 'triumphal' entry into Jerusalem was followed by his 'cleansing' of the temple, most certainly an act of revenge against those who mocked him, rather than by his indignation at what was going on in the temple.

The Cleansing of the Temple

Directly after his 'triumphal' entry into Jerusalem, Christ 'cleansed' the temple by driving out all the traders who were making his 'Father's house a house of trade.' When Paul (Christ) was seized by the crowd at the temple decades later, he was accused of having brought Greeks into the temple area and having defiled 'this holy place.' Epiphanius claims that James wore the breastplate of the high priest and the high priestly diadem on his head and actually entered the Holy of Holies.[104,105] Eusebius likewise records that John the Beloved had become a sacrificing priest who wore the mitre,[106] which was the headdress of the high priest. This suggests that Christ and his disciples had robbed these holy items from the temple. Furthermore, Demas, one of the two robbers who were crucified with Christ,[107] stole the 'secret deposit' of Solomon from the Holy of Holies, an act which Judas blamed on Christ. The actual text from *The Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea* reads:

> In those days in which they condemned the Son of God to be crucified, seven days before Christ suffered, two condemned robbers were sent from Jericho to the procurator Pilate; and their case was as follows: The first, his name Gestas…And the case of the other was as follows: He was called Demas, and was by birth a Galilæan, and kept an inn. **He made attacks upon the rich**, but was good to the poor…**And he set his hand to robbing the multitude of the Jews**, **and stole the law itself in Jerusalem**, and stripped naked the daughter of Caiaphas, who was priestess of the sanctuary, and took away from its place the mysterious deposit itself placed there by Solomon. Such were his doings.…And to Caiaphas and the multitude of the Jews it was not a Passover, **but it was a great mourning to them, on account of the plundering of the sanctuary by the robber**. And they summoned Judas Iscariot,…And on the third day, before Jesus was laid hold of, Judas says to the Jews: Come, let us hold a council; **for perhaps it was not the robber that stole the law, but Jesus himself, and I accuse him**.[108]

Christ as Yeshu was accused of robbing the *shem hamphoras*, the 'secret name of god' from the Holy of Holies, as related in the earlier discussion on Simon Magus in section 5.2. There can be little doubt that Christ had indeed defiled the temple by robbing it of its treasures and holy objects, including the sacred breastplate and diadem, and that he had allowed his followers to enter every chamber of the temple in search of booty. In the *Toledot Yeshu* it is in fact recorded that Christ entered the temple with 310 of his followers,[109] hardly the image of a lone Jesus kicking over tables portrayed in the New Testament.

It would appear that John had mockingly enacted the role of the high priest during the storming and robbing of the temple, and that rumours of this sacrilegious act were rationalised by claiming that he had actually served as a priest. The mitre must have been passed around amongst the disciples of Christ, who treated this holy object with contempt and mockery. The majority of the followers of Christ came from the lower echelons of life, many of them freedmen and foreigners, amongst whom would have been Greeks (see the appeal made by Simon bar Gioras in section 9.1). In other words, like Paul, Christ had brought Greeks into the temple area.

Furthermore, the Gospels relate that when Christ died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.[110] This curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place,[111] and as related in *The Infancy Gospel of James*, Mary had woven the purple and scarlet part of that temple curtain (see section 2.1). The tearing of the curtain

most certainly occurred when Christ stormed the temple and the part woven by his mother was torn off.

Christ Portrayed as a Donkey

Evidence that Christ had indeed been ridiculed after the 'triumphal entry' disaster is readily to be found:

- As argued by Hereford, in the Talmud Christ may be indirectly referred to as Balaam, who was a false prophet of Israel and whose donkey conversed with him:

  > R. Johanan said [concerning Balaam], '**In the beginning a prophet, in the end a deceiver**.' Rab Papa said, 'This is that which they say, **She was the descendant of princes and rulers, she played the harlot with carpenters**.'[112]

  The first sentence obviously refers to Christ, while the second can only refer to Christ's mother, Mariamne I, who was a former royal wife and whose royal family had ruled Judea before the arrival of Herod the Great. Mary was 'married' to Joseph, who supposedly was a carpenter (see section 2.4, 'lignarius'), but in truth she committed adultery with him. The contentious caricature of a crucified donkey (figure 6.2), an inscription carved in plaster on a wall near the Palatine Hill in Rome and generally referred to as the Alexamenos Grafitto, suggests that Christ was ridiculed as a crucified donkey.[113] The inscription reads 'Alexamenos worships god.'

Figure 6.2. 'Alexamenos worships god'[114]

- The Gnostic book *The Gospel of Philip* makes the following curious statement about Christ: '**The eucharist is Jesus. In Syriac it is called pharisatha, which is "one who is spread out," since Jesus came to crucify the world**.'[115] If the word *pharisatha* is of Hebrew origin and not Syriac as claimed, several Hebrew words can be combined to form phrases phonetically similar to that description. Of these, the combination of the words *pere'*[116] (in the sense of running wild, 'a wild ass') and *shêthâh*[117] (the seat of

a person, his buttocks) would imply that Christ was sitting on a wild or untamed donkey and ended up 'spread out,' meaning flat on his back or face. Contrary to John's description,[118] Christ seems to have worn only a linen garment with no underwear (see section 8.2), and it would appear that he had fallen off the colt in such a manner that his posterior had been exposed. The curious mention here of Christ as the eucharist, which means 'thanksgiving,' can also be explained in this thrown-off-a-donkey context. One of the Hebrew words for 'giving thanks' is *yâdâh*,[119] which literally means 'to use the hand' or in a physical sense, '**to throw something at or away**,' and only by association, 'to worship, revere, or give thanks (with extended hands).' It therefore seems that the author here attempted to explain away the embarrassing incident when Christ was thrown off the donkey. The Alexamenos Graffito indeed emphasises his buttocks.

- Tertullian twice mentions a caricature of Christ as a donkey, which appeared in the city of Carthage:

> For, like some others, you are under the delusion that **our god is an ass's head**…But lately a new edition of our god has been given to the world in that great city: it originated with a certain vile man who was wont to hire himself out to cheat the wild beasts, and who exhibited a picture with this inscription: **The God of the Christians, born of an ass**. **He had the ears of an ass, was hoofed in one foot, carried a book, and wore a toga**.[120]

and

> Not so long ago, a most abandoned wretch in that city of yours, a man who had deserted indeed his own religion—a Jew, in fact, who had only lost his skin, flayed of course by wild beasts, against which he enters the lists for hire day after day with a sound body, and so in a condition to lose his skin—carried about in public a caricature of us with this label: ***Onocoetes***. This (figure) had ass's ears, and was dressed in a toga with a book, **having a hoof on one of his feet**. And the crowd believed this infamous Jew. For what other set of men is the seedplot of all the calumny against us? Throughout the city, therefore, *Onocoetes* is all the talk.[121]

The carving is shown in figure 6.3, and the Latin inscription below the image actually reads *Deus Christianorum Onocoetes*, meaning 'God of the Christians Onocoetes.'[122] The word *onocoetes*, of which alternative spellings occur in different manuscripts, appears nowhere else in Roman literature, and scholars are of the opinion[123] that the first syllable, *ono*, represents the Greek word *onos*,[124] meaning 'a donkey or ass,' and the remainder of the word has something to do with sex, from the Latin word *coetus* (*coitus*),[125] meaning either 'a meeting' or 'sexual union.' The Latin word *onager* refers to a 'wild ass,'[126] and the word *onocrotalus* refers to a 'large water fowl which brays like an ass.'[127] The Latin word *crotalum*[128] refers to a 'musical instrument made of two brass plates,' while *crotalia*[129] describes 'jewels worn so that they jingle as they strike against one another.' The word *ono-crotalus*, therefore, literally means 'ass-jingle,' which confirms that the syllable *ono* refers to an ass or a donkey. The inscription *ono-coetes* may therefore indeed be interpreted as 'born from copulation with an ass.'[130] The inscription is alternatively interpreted as 'The god of the Christians (is) a donkey who beds (with his worshippers).'[131] Another carving (figure 6.4) appears to depict one of the donkey teacher's followers as naked with an erect penis (the one standing next to him).[132]

Figure 6.3. 'The God of the Christians Ass-Begotten'[133]

Figure 6.4. Seated donkey teacher with followers[134]

The Christian apologist Minucius Felix, in his *Octavius*, records accusations brought against the Christian faith:

> I hear that they adore **the head of an ass**, that basest of creatures, consecrated by I know not what silly persuasion—a worthy and appropriate religion for such manners. **Some say that they worship the virilia** (genitals) **of their pontiff and priest** and adore the nature, as it were, of their common parent.[135]

The depictions of Christ as an ass must have had a specific origin, which must certainly have been Christ's supposed triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. The accusation that Christians worshipped the head of an ass may refer to the decapitated head of their God (as Paul, see section 8.4). Why Christ would have been associated with a penis is discussed in section 8.1 (Christ and John) and section 9.2 (the crimes of John of Gischala).

In conclusion, Christ's unfortunate encounter with the donkey on which he attempted to enter Jerusalem made him a public joke in Israel, and it was most likely at this point that he realised that the Jews would never accept him as their king and far less as their Messiah. It was not long afterwards that Christ condemned ('woe to you') the religious leaders of the Jews and in fact Jerusalem itself,[136] promising that they would not see him again until they recognised him as the one who had come 'in the name of the Lord.' From that point onwards, he would turn to violence, first against the temple and then against the Jewish upper class.

6.3 The Companions of Christ, Simon Magus and Paul

Christ, Simon Magus, and Paul were all closely associated with one specific woman. If Christ, Paul, and Simon Magus had all been one and the same person, then this woman under different guises must likewise have been the same person.

Christ and Mary Magdalene

In the case of Christ, his close relationship with Mary Magdalene is recorded in the New Testament (she was one of his constant companions) as well as in apocryphal texts like the *Pistis Sophia*, *The Gospel of Philip,* and *The Gospel of Mary*.[137] In the *Pistis Sophia,* Christ engages in a long dialogue with his disciples, and in this document Mary is exalted above the others:

> Mary, thou blessed one, **whom I will perfect in all mysteries** of those of the height, discourse in openness, thou, whose heart is raised to the kingdom of heaven **more than all thy brethren**.[138]

In *The Gospel of Philip,* it is recorded that Christ used to kiss Mary Magdalene on the mouth (interpreted):

> And the companion of [the saviour was Mar]y Ma[gda]lene. [Christ loved] M[ary] more than [all] the disci[ples, and used to] kiss her [often] on her [mouth]

and he was accused by the disciples of loving her more than any of them. This view is repeated in *The Gospel of Mary,*[139] where Peter tells Mary:

> Sister, we know that the Saviour loved you more than the rest of the women.

and Levi reacts to Peter's objections:

> Surely, the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us.

Peter's resentment of Mary Magdalene is also evident from *The Gospel of Thomas*,[140] in which he demands:

> Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of the life,

to which Christ makes the controversial and nonsensical reply:

> I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. **For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven**.

Christ's relationship with Mary Magdalene is discussed further in chapter 7, and her capture and execution by the Romans are discussed in section 7.3.

Simon Magus and Helen, His Whore

As discussed in section 5.2, Simon Magus's Helen can be linked to Mariamne II as Mary Magdalene, who was a former beautiful queen of the Jews. Simon Magus referred to his companion as Helen because of her exceptional beauty, likening her to the Greek Helen of Troy. Curiously, though, Simon Magus also referred to her as his prostitute.[141,142]

A potential link between Helen and Mary Magdalene can be found in a Latin version of her name, *Magi*[143] (magicians) *de*[144] (of) *lena*[145] (a procuress, bawd, or brothel-keeper), rendering *Magidelena*, or the magicians of the brothel-keeper, the magicians being Christ and his disciples. The word *Magidelena* is phonetically almost identical to the *Magdalena* of Mary Magdalene and appears to have been interpreted simply as 'the Magician's Whore.' Christ's reward to the savages who fought on his behalf was the beautiful wives and daughters of the rich, the many virgins who supposedly were converted by the disciples (see chapters 9 and 10). Since they were circulated amongst his men, these doomed young women would have been referred to as the 'whores' who belonged to Christ's 'brothel.' It would appear that Mary Magdalene was in charge of this 'brothel.'

Luke relates that Christ was anointed by a woman who had lived a sinful life, which was usually interpreted to mean that she was a prostitute.[146] She is identified by John as Mary, the sister of Martha and of Lazarus,[147] who was also known as Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was therefore referred to as a prostitute, as was Simon Magus's Helen. It should be noted that Christ's Sophia, a pseudonym he used for his mother Mary, sometimes appears to have been confused with Mary Magdalene, his companion. Mead, in his discussion of *The Book of Elxai*, concludes:

> In the microcosm of man, these daughters are presumably two aspects of the human soul, the Sophia below, or sorrowing one; tending downward she is regarded as the 'lustful one' (Prunicus), the harlot; tending upward she becomes the spouse of the Christos.[148]

Although the meaning of Prunicus is not obvious, some scholars have translated it as 'whore,'[149] which confirms that Christ's companion (Mary Magdalene) was generally known as a 'whore.'

Another link between Christ's Mary Magdalene and Simon's companion is to be found in *The Acts of Peter,* where the apostle confronts Eubula, with whom Simon Magus 'lodged,' and wins her over for Christ:

> I drove this Simon out of Judaea where he did many evils with his magical charms, **lodging in Judaea** with a **certain woman Eubula, who was of honourable estate in this world, having store of gold and pearls of no small price**. Here did Simon enter in by stealth with two others like unto himself, and none of the household saw them two, but Simon only, and by means of a spell they took away all the woman's gold, and disappeared. But Eubula, when she found what was done, began to **torture her household**,

> saying: Ye have taken occasion by this man of God and spoiled me, when ye saw him entering in to me to honour a mere woman; but his name is as the name of the Lord.
>
> When I heard that, I went unto Eubula and found her sitting with her clothes rent and her hair disordered, mourning; unto whom I said: Eubula, rise up from thy mourning and compose thy face and **order thy hair and put on raiment befitting thee**.
>
> But Eubula, **when she had recovered all her goods, gave them for the service of the poor**, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was comforted; and despised and renounced this world, and gave unto the widows and fatherless, and clothed the poor.

Far from being an honourable and simple woman as described elsewhere in the text, it is clear that this Eubula was a wealthy and famed woman, exactly as Mariamne II would have been. The Latin word *bulla* describes a golden charm or amulet worn around the neck by children of noblemen until the age of seventeen. It had the shape of a heart and was hollow inside.[150] The adjective *eu* means 'O brave!,'[151] 'Well done!,' or 'Good!,'[152] so *Eubula* may be interpreted as 'Brave bulla!,' who must have been regarded as particularly brave for some reason. That she was of honourable estate suggests that she was of a wealthy and noble family, and the reference to her hair that needed to be ordered and the proper clothing she should get dressed in are in line with the beautiful Mary Magdalene, who must have had striking, flowing hair (see section 7.2). The family with whom Simon Magus lodged matches the house of a Pharisee called Simon the Leper (Simon Boethus, the father of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, and Martha), where Mary Magdalene anointed Christ with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume and washed his feet with her hair.[153] This house would also be the house of Simon the Tanner, where Simon Peter resided for some time.[154]

Paul and Thecla (Perpetua)

In *The Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*, subtitled *The Story of Perpetua*,[155] it is related that when Paul was being led away in chains by soldiers to be beheaded, they encountered **a one-eyed woman** called Perpetua, whom Paul asked for her handkerchief (Paul's miracles included healing using handkerchiefs[156]), and she requests:

> I adjure you by the health of Caesar **to bind his eyes with this handkerchief** when you cut off his head.

When Paul was beheaded, the blood-stained handkerchief was returned to Perpetua, whose eye was healed immediately. The text continues:

> And the three soldiers who had cut off the head of Saint Paul, when after three hours they came on the same day with **the Bulla** bringing it to Nero, having met Perpetua, they said to her: What is it, woman?…Then the soldiers who had **the Bulla**, recognising the handkerchief, and seeing that her eye had been opened…

From this text we learn that a woman who was with Paul at his execution and who may have been forced to witness the event is associated with a bulla, and a very specific bulla ('the,' not 'a'), at that. The name Perpetua appears to mean something like 'She who lives forever,' from the Latin *perpetuus, perpetua*[157] (continuous, uninterrupted). Her association with Paul and her *bulla* identify her with Eubula, the woman with a fabled and obviously very expensive amulet.

Incidentally, the handkerchief played a significant role in the execution of political prisoners and criminals in the Circus Maximus.[158] The president or 'giver' of the exhibition, which usually took the form of fights between men or between men and and animals, would drop his handkerchief to start the event, and when the life of a defeated

gladiator or person should be spared, the crowd would wave their handkerchiefs. He would be executed if the majority of the spectators were to show an upwards flick of the thumb. Paul's bloodied handkerchief may simply be stating that he was paraded in the Circus Maximus and was killed when the crowd dropped their handkerchiefs to the ground.

In *The Life of Saint Paul the Apostle*, the buildup to Paul's execution is described as follows:

> And as he was led to the place of his passion in the gate of Hostence, a noble woman named **Plautilla**, a disciple of Paul, who after another name was called **Lemobia**, for haply she had two names, met there with Paul, which weeping, commended her to his prayers. To whom Paul said: Farewell, Plautilla, daughter of everlasting health, **lend to me thy veil or keverchief** with which thou coverest thy head, **that I may bind mine eyes therewith**, and afterwards I shall restore it to thee again. And when she had delivered it to him, the butchers scorned her, saying: Why hast thou delivered to this enchanter so precious a cloth for to lose it ? Then, when he came to the place of his passion, he turned him toward the east, holding his hands up to heaven right long, with tears praying in his own language and thanking our Lord, and after that bade his brethren farewell, and **bound his eyes himself with the keverchief of Plautilla**, and kneeling down on both knees, stretched forth his neck, and so was beheaded. And as soon as the head was from the body, it said: Jesus Christus! which had been to Jesus or Christus, or both, fifty times. From his wound sprang out milk into the clothes of the knight, and afterward flowed out blood. In the air was a great shining light, and from the body came a much sweet odour.

There can be no doubt that the woman with the handkerchief in this text is the same as Perpetua of the earlier narrative. However, here she is described by the double name Plautilla Lemobia. The first of these names, Plautilla, most likely is a reference to Rubellius Plautus,[159] a rival of Nero (see section 7.5 for Mary Magdalene's probable involvement in the murder of Nero's mother). Plautus had married a woman called Antistia Pollitta, and 'Plautilla' may simply have evolved from the names Plautus and Pollitta; in other words, it was remembered or recorded incorrectly.

There are no exact Latin equivalents for *Lemobia*, but it is nevertheless possible to construct the name by phonetically similar Latin words. One possible combination is given by the Latin *lema*,[160] 'a white humor, matter congealed in the eyes, bleary-eyedness' and *obeo, obire, obii obitum*,[161] 'to go to, to visit, to look over, to view, to cover or be round a thing.' The name *Lema-obii* most likely means '(She whose) eye(s) had been covered.' If this was the original meaning, both women are linked to an eye defect—the one-eyed Perpetua and Plautilla Lemobia, whose eyesight was impaired.

As portrayed in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the most well-known woman to be associated with Paul, however, appears to be Thecla,[162] a virgin who was betrothed to be married to a man called Thamyris. Thecla overheard Paul's preaching and promptly turned her back on Thamyris. The enraged man had Paul thrown into prison, where he was secretly visited by Thecla:

> And Thecla in the night **took off her bracelets** and gave them to the doorkeeper, and when the door was opened for her she went off to the prison. To the jailor she gave a **silver mirror**, and so went in to Paul and sat at his feet and heard him proclaim the mighty acts of God. And Paul feared nothing, but comported himself with full confidence in God; and her faith also was increased, as she kissed his fetters.

Thecla, who at one stage promised Paul that **she would cut her hair** and follow him, was found 'so to speak, bound with him in affection,' and refused to return to Thamyris. On the **insistence of her mother Theocleia,** she was condemned to be burned alive:

> Burn the lawless one! Burn her that is no bride in the midst of the theatre, that all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid,

but she was saved from the fire and survived numerous subsequent tortures. It is a fallacy that the Romans tortured those who were with Christ simply for their belief in him. Those who were tortured were closely associated with his crimes, and no other woman would have been closer to Christ in this respect than Mary Magdalene, so one may expect that it was she who had been tortured.

The story of Thecla and Paul makes Thecla a wealthy woman (the bracelets and silver mirror) and places Thecla in prison with Paul (as was Perpetua). It also mentions what must have been well known (to the public)—her bracelets (the 'bulla')—and implies that she had beautiful hair, as it would have been a tremendous sacrifice to cut it off. It seems that Christian authors later constructed their own version of events around the information that had been received from Rome: that Paul and Thecla had both been executed by the Romans. Paul would have been imprisoned twice only: once when he was arrested to be crucified as Jesus Christ, and the second time when he was captured at the temple, taken to Rome, and beheaded after having been paraded as a trophy for a couple of years by his captors.

The etymology of the name Thecla (often spelled Thekla) seems to link her directly to the exceptionally beautiful Mariamne II (see Chapter 7, The Age of Mary Magdalene), as the origin of the name must certainly be the Hebrew word *tiklâh*,[163] which means 'completeness' or 'perfection.' There appears to be no clear identification of Thamyris, the man to whom Thecla was betrothed and whose

future mother-in-law demanded the execution of her own daughter, but one would expect the name to refer to Herod the Great. It was Mariamne I who was ordered to be executed by Herod's tribunal, while Mariamne II was only divorced by him. It was Alexandra, the mother of Mariamne I, who demanded her daughter to be executed:

> [Alexandra] reproached her daughter in the hearing of all the people; and cried out that she had been an ill woman, and ungrateful to her husband, and that her punishment came justly upon her for such her insolent behavior.

echoing the words of Theocleia, Thecla's mother. How many mothers would demand the execution of their own daughters?

The first part of the name *Thamy-ris* may represent the Hebrew word *tâmê'*,[164] which means 'contaminated, unclean, or polluted.' The last syllable of the name could mean either 'poison' from *rô'sh* (*rê'sh*),[165] 'poverty' from *rîysh*,[166] or 'to be destitute' or 'to lack' from *rûwsh*.[167] The name Thamyris, therefore, appears to mean something like 'being without due to pollution,' freely translated as 'lost because of infection' or simply 'rotted off,' which would be an apt description of Herod's venereal disease as recorded by Josephus.

Digressing momentarily, in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul is accompanied by two persons called Demas and Hermogenes, following his flight from Antioch. A man named Demas was crucified alongside Christ and presumably did not survive, so unless there were two men called Demas associated with Christ, the author of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* may have had access to information linking Demas to Christ but linked him to Paul instead.

In *The Story of Paul and Philip in Iconium*,[168] a **harlot**, 'of most beautiful form and face, and appearance,' walks hand-in-hand with Paul and Philip to the governor's home and wife. She matches Simon Magus's beautiful companion Helen, whom he referred to as a prostitute, Christ's Mary Magdalene, who was his companion and whom

he likewise referred to as a prostitute, and Mariamne II, the former wife of Herod the Great who was renowned for her beauty.

In conclusion, the names of the woman closely associated with Christ, Simon Magus, and Paul all point to one woman, who was known by any of the names Mariamne II, Mary Magdalene, Helen, Eubula, Thecla, and Perpetua.

6.4 Paul's Execution

The author of the Acts of the Apostles does not recount the manner in which Paul died, only that he spent his last years under house arrest in Rome,[169] supposedly preaching the kingdom of God. In reality, this well-spoken little freak of nature would have been kept for the amusement of the Roman upper class, who no doubt enjoyed conversing with him. The majority of apocryphal texts, however, relate that Paul was beheaded following some years of imprisonment, as summarised by Schaff:

> This tradition, that Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome, is early and universal, and disputed by no counter-tradition and may be accepted as the one certain historical fact known about Paul outside of the New Testament accounts. Clement (Ad. Cor. chap. 5) is the first to mention the death of Paul, and seems to imply, though he does not directly state, that his death took place in Rome during the persecution of Nero. Caius, a writer of the first quarter of the third century, is another witness to his death in Rome, as is also Dionysius of Corinth of the second century. Origen (quoted by Eusebius. III. 1) states that he was martyred in Rome under Nero. Tertullian (at the end of the second century), in his De præscriptione Hær. chap. 36, is still more distinct, recording that Paul was beheaded in Rome. Eusebius and Jerome accept this tradition unhesitatingly, and we may do likewise. As a

> Roman citizen, we should expect him to meet death by the sword.[170]

Of particular interest is a claim supposedly made by Simon Magus:

> Then said Simon Magus to Nero: Because that thou shalt know me to be the very son of God, **command my head to be smitten off and I shall arise again the third day**. Then Nero commanded to his brother to smite off his head, and when he supposed to have beheaded Simon, he beheaded a ram. Simon, by his art magic went away unhurt, gathered together the members of the ram, and hid him three days. The blood of the ram abode and congealed. The third day he came and showed him to Nero, saying: Command my blood to be washed away, for lo **I am he that was beheaded**, and as I promised I have risen again the third day.[171]

Although the text attempts to demonstrate the trickery of Simon Magus, he is nevertheless linked to the same death as Paul, another suggestion that Simon Magus and Paul were one and the same person. *The Acts of Peter* claims that Simon Magus attempted to prove his divinity by flying up above the Forum, but the prayers of Peter and Paul caused him to fall down to the earth, suffering severe injuries and death shortly thereafter. Although this version of his death is utter nonsense, this particular claim warrants further investigation.

Even though not stated in as many words, Christ effectively also flew into the sky when he was taken up into heaven.[172] A less known and bizarre tradition, however, relates that Christ and Judas flew into the air, where Judas overpowered and defiled Christ:

> Yeshu went to Upper Galilee. The Sages came before the Queen, complaining that Yeshu practiced sorcery and was leading everyone astray. Therefore she sent Annanui and Ahaziah to fetch him.
>
> They found him in Upper Galilee, proclaiming himself the Son of God. When they tried to take him there was a struggle, but Yeshu said to the men of Upper Galilee: 'Wage no battle.' **He would prove himself by the power which came to him from his Father in heaven**. He spoke the Ineffable Name over the birds of clay and they flew into the air. He spoke the same letters over a millstone that had been placed upon the waters. **He sat in it and it floated like a boat**. When they saw this the people marveled. At the behest of Yeshu, the emissaries departed and reported these wonders to the Queen. She trembled with astonishment.
>
> Then the Sages selected a man named Judas Iskarioto and brought him to the Sanctuary where he learned the letters of the Ineffable Name as Yeshu had done.
>
> When Yeshu was summoned before the queen, this time there were present also the Sages and Judas the Iskarioto. Yeshu said: 'It is spoken of me, "I will ascend into heaven."' **He lifted his arms like the wings of an eagle and he flew between heaven and earth, to the amazement of everyone.**
>
> The elders asked Judas Iskarioto to do likewise. He did, and flew toward heaven. Iskarioto attempted to force Yeshu down to earth but neither one of the two could prevail against the other for **both had the use of the Ineffable Name**. However, **Iskarioto defiled Yeshu**, so that they both lost their power and fell down to the earth, and in their condition of defilement the letters of the Ineffable Name escaped from them.[173]

The act translated here as 'defiled' appears in various manuscripts and versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* as Judas urinating or ejaculating

semen upon Christ, while a late version has Judas sodomising Christ in midair.[174]

This text is an almost verbatim version of the display of Simon Magus in Rome before his death. The author also suggests that the surname of Judas Iscariot was derived from the Latin *sicarii*, with the first two letters reversed. The more likely interpretation of this name (Is-care-otii) is discussed in section 7.1. The act of sodomy with Christ is discussed in greater detail in section 8.1 (Jesus and John).

The above reference to Christ being involved in a midair struggle is echoed in the Jerusalem Targum, where Christ is referred to as Balaam:

> Phinehas decided to slay Balaam, the latter on seeing his pursuer 'resorted to witchcraft **and flew up in the air, but Phinehas made use of the Holy Name**, seized him by the head,' and slew him with the sword,[175]

and the Talmud:

> A Min said to R. Chanina: Hast thou by any chance ascertained what age Balaam was? He answered: There is nothing written concerning it. But since it is said, '**Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days**,' **he was either thirty-three or thirty-four years old**. The Min answered: Thou hast spoken well; for I have myself seen a chronicle of Balaam in which it is said: Thirty-three years old was **Balaam the lame man**, when the robber Phineas slew him.[176]

These two accounts of Christ and a rival flying up in the air to engage in battle match the legend of Dositheus and Christ both having flown to a cave, as related in section 5.1. The ability to fly was usually associated with sorcerers,[177] confirming once more that Christ

was believed to be a sorcerer—i.e., he was originally known as Simon Magus. Christ was generally believed to have been crucified at the age of thirty-three. That he was indeed a 'bloodthirsty and deceitful' man is shown in chapter 9.

There is no direct statement as to what had become of the body of Simon Magus, but it is implied that he was buried at Terracina:

> But Simon in his misfortune found some helpers who carried him on a stretcher by night from Rome to Aricia; and after staying there he was taken to a man named Castor, who had been banished from Rome to Terracina on a charge of sorcery; and there he underwent an operation, and thus Simon, the angel of the Devil, ended his life.[178]

An older translation reads:

> And there he was sorely cut (Lat. by two physicians), and so Simon the angel of Satan came to his end.[179]

In *The Acts of Peter and Paul,* it is related only that Simon Magus fell to earth at a place called Sacra Via, or the Holy Way, and was divided into four parts.[180] The Sacra Via[181] was the main street of ancient Rome and led to the Roman Forum, where Simon Magus flew into the air. The Temple of Castor and Pollux is an ancient edifice in the Roman Forum, dedicated to the twin gods of those names.[182] Castor and Pollux were brothers of Helen,[183] and it is certainly possible that the author of *The Acts of Peter* mistakenly brought this Castor into the picture because of Castor's association with a Helen (the whore of Simon Magus).

The body of Paul was supposedly buried at the site of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome.[184] Irrespective of where exactly the bodies of Simon Magus and Paul were buried, both remained in Italy, a further link between Simon Magus and Paul of Tarsus.

Finally, Victorinus of Pettau (died ca. 303 CE)[185] claims that Christ was baptised in 46 CE and died in 59 CE,[186] which matches the time of death of Paul (see section 4.2). Victorinus also confirms that Christ lived beyond the age of thirty-three. It would appear that rumours about the true identity of Paul had survived into the fourth century before ultimately being suppressed by the Church.

7

Mary Magdalene

> Christ loved Mary more than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her mouth.
>
> —*The Gospel of Philip*

> Miriam, the daughter of Boethus…if I did not see the Romans bind her hair to the tails of the horses of Arabs and make her run from Jerusalem to Lydda.
>
> —*Midrash Rabbah*: Lamentations 1:47

The New Testament relates relatively little of Mary Magdalene, one of the most enigmatic figures in the life of Christ. Prior to the Crucifixion of Christ, she is mentioned by name only as a follower of Christ and a woman from whom seven demons had been exorcised.[1] She is mentioned amongst the women who were present at Christ's crucifixion,[2] and she was the first person to whom the resurrected Christ appeared.[3] Scholars have expressed their doubts about the authenticity of verses 9 to 20 of Mark 16 as the most reliable early manuscripts of Mark do not contain these verses.[4] Nevertheless, the text exists, and though it may not have been written by the author of Mark, a later editor must have felt obliged to make this statement.

The name Mary Magdalene is traditionally interpreted as meaning Mary of Magdala. Some scholars believe Magdala to be a town which existed on the shores of Lake Galilee,[5] although others have rejected this hypothesis, since the original name in the New Testament was Magadan.[6] The Talmud identifies a town called *Magdala Nunayya*, or 'Magdala of the Fishes,' near Tiberias, which could potentially be the town in question.[7] Luke, however, states that Mary (Magdalene) was called Magdalene and not that she was from Magdalene.

It should also be noted that the Hebrew word *migdâl*,[8] meaning 'a tower,' is phonetically similar to *Magdala* and to a lesser extent also to *Magdalene*, but this would not make sense in terms of a Mary being addressed as 'Tower.' Jerome, nevertheless, wrote of Mary Magdalene:

> And especially how Mary Magdalen—called **the tower** from the earnestness and glow of her faith.…[9]

One of the three towers erected by Herod the Great at his temple was called Mariamne, most likely in memory of his executed wife Mariamne, and one of the Greek words for a tower is indeed *Magdala*.[10] As related earlier, Luna (another name for Mary, the mother of Christ) was locked up in a tower during Herod's absence, and it is easily understood how this vague memory could be associated with Mary Magdalene instead of Mariamne I. The interpretation of Magdalene as Magi-de-Lena, 'the magicians of the brothel-keeper' or 'the Magician's Whore' (see section 6.3), however, remains the most likely origin of the name Magdalene.

All four Gospels mention a scene in which a woman anoints Christ with an expensive perfume. She is not named by Matthew, who places the event in Bethany in the house of a man known as Simon the Leper.[11] Mark repeats this account,[12] while Luke states that the owner of the house was Simon the Pharisee and that the woman had led a sinful life, meaning that she was a prostitute.[13] John also places the event in Bethany but in addition adds that she was called Mary, the sister of Martha and of Lazarus, whom Christ had resurrected.[14] According to Matthew and Mark, the woman anointed Christ's head, while Luke and John have her anointing Christ's feet and wiping them with her hair. This minor discrepancy may cause some to see the event as two separate incidents, but it must have been the same event recorded slightly differently by the authors of the Gospels. Mark specifically names Mary as Mary Magdalene, from

whom Christ had cast seven demons. Just how many women would Christ have allowed to perform such an intimate act?

As discussed in section 6.3, Christ must have had a very intimate relationship with Mary Magdalene. This relationship would no doubt have been romantic (sexual) and not platonic in nature. As Christ's constant companion after his 'resurrection,' she would have become as notorious as he was and would have been sought by the Roman and Jewish authorities as much as Christ was.

The Age of Mary Magdalene

An important aspect that needs to be addressed is how old Mary Magdalene would have been had she indeed been the same person as Mariamne II, as argued in this treatise. According to Josephus, Herod the Great married Mariamne II around the thirteenth year of his reign, when a great famine had struck Judea.[15] Herod reigned from 37 BCE to 4 BCE, and the thirteenth year would have been 24 BCE. Assuming that Mariamne was still very young at that stage, possibly only twelve years old, she would have been born around 36 BCE.

Herod divorced her shortly before his death, when she was implicated in a plot to overthrow him.[16] She was 'esteemed the most beautiful woman of that time,' and it is strange that in a marriage lasting nearly twenty years, she had borne Herod only a single child, Herod II, whom Herod had excluded from his will.[17]

If Josephus had indeed been fathered by Joseph, the father of Christ (see section 2.3), and even worse, if his mother had been Mariamne II, he would have attempted to distance himself as far as possible from Christ and Mariamne, who had become known as the whore of Christ, the Magician. He would then have placed the marriage of Herod to Mariamne II relatively early during Herod's reign and moved his own birth as late as possible (ca. 37 CE[18]). The latest **possible date of birth of Mariamne II** would have been around **17 BCE**, assuming that she had become pregnant at the age of twelve and that her son had already been born when Herod died in 4 BCE.

Under his original name, Joseph ben Gorion, Josephus states that **his mother was eighty-seven years old** during Titus's siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE.[19] That means that she would have been **born in 17 BCE**, confirming this late date of birth for Mariamne II. Joseph ben Gorion claims that his mother pleaded for his life to be spared, but he seems to have introduced this event in order to place her in Jerusalem as opposed to the woman who was taken to Rome to be executed some years before the siege began.

If Mariamne II had been born in 36 BCE instead, she would have been around thirty-six when she met Christ, fifty-seven when he was crucified in 21 CE, and theoretically ninety-two in the year 56 CE, when Paul was taken to Rome to be executed. Had she been born as late as 17 BCE, she would have been around seventeen when she met Christ, thirty-eight when he was crucified, and seventy-three when Paul was taken to Rome. Another indication of the younger age of Mariamne is provided by the fact that her sister Martha was alive during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE.[20] Unless her mother practised birth control in some way or another, one may assume that her children would have followed in more or less quick succession; in other words, Martha and Mariamne must have been close in age, Martha being the younger of the two. If Mariamne had been born in 17 BCE, she would have been eighty-seven in the year 70 CE. However, no mention is made of the presence of Mariamne in Jerusalem during the siege.

It must be noted that people of the upper class of Israel in the century before and after Christ seem to have enjoyed extreme longevity. According to Eusebius, for example, Simon, the son of Clopas, died at the age of 120 years.[21] Their longevity was probably due to their consumption of natural foods of which they, as the upper class, would have had ample supplies.

Josephus did not record when or how Mariamne II died, and, in addition, none of the early Christian documents, the New Testament included, mention anything about the death of Mary Magdalene. A

thin thread that might lead us to the circumstances of her death may, however, be found in one particular aspect of the physical appearance of Mary Magdalene, her hair. First, though, her direct family is discussed.

7.1 The Boethus Family

Christ befriended and 'loved' Mary Magdalene, her sister Martha, and her brother Lazarus.[22] As recognised by Baltz,[23] there was only one prominent family who lived in that era and who had three children of identical names, namely the family of Simon Boethus. His children were called Mariamne, Martha, and Eleazar. In Hebrew the name Lazarus is indistinguishable from Eleazar, as written Hebrew has no vowels.[24] However, Baltz's theory seems not to have gained acceptance amongst scholars, most likely because it would require Christ to have been born earlier than 4 BCE, and Mary Magdalene would have been an elderly woman in 33 CE, but more significantly, it would mean that Christ had somehow become involved with a former wife of Herod the Great.

The Boethus (Boethius) family was one of the most renowned—or most notorious—families of Judea during the first couple of decades before and after Christ. The family was headed by Simon, the son of Boethus, whose daughter Mariamne became the third wife of Herod the Great:

> There was one Simon, a citizen of Jerusalem, the son of one Boethus, a citizen of Alexandria, and a priest of great note there; this man had a daughter, **who was esteemed the most beautiful woman of that time**; and when the people of Jerusalem began to speak much in her commendation, it happened that Herod was much affected with what was said of her; and when he saw the damsel, he was smitten with her beauty, yet did he entirely reject the thoughts of using his authority to abuse her, as believing,

> what was the truth, that by so doing he should be stigmatized for violence and tyranny; so he thought it best to take the damsel to wife. And while Simon was of a dignity too inferior to be allied to him, but still too considerable to be despised, he governed his inclinations after the most prudent manner, by augmenting the dignity of the family, and making them more honorable; so he immediately deprived Jesus, the son of Phabet, of the high priesthood, and conferred that dignity on Simon, and so joined in affinity with him [by marrying his daughter].[25]

The Talmud refers to Mariam and her sister Martha as the daughters of Boethus[26] and not the daughters of Simon the son of Boethus, so it seems that Simon the son of Boethus was also simply known as Simon Boethus. The name Simon Boethus is used throughout this treatise.

The Boethus family was renowned for their wealth but was hated for the way in which they accumulated it. They did not refrain from using violence against the ordinary citizens and used to beat them with sticks, evidently to force them to pay:

> Woe is me because of **the house of Boethus**; woe is me because of their staves! Woe is me because of the house of Hanin, woe is me because of their whisperings! Woe is me because of **the house of Kathros**, woe is me because of their pens! Woe is me because of the house of Ishmael the son of Phabi, woe is me because of their fists! For they are High Priests and their sons are [Temple] treasurers and their sons-in-law are trustees and their servants beat the people with staves.[27]

Simon Boethus served as high priest around 22 to 5 BCE,[28,29] as did several of his sons. This accords with Josephus's account that Herod

had married Mariamne II around this time. For reasons unknown, Simon Boethus appears to have been well known to the Romans, amongst whom he had earned himself several nicknames.

Simon Boethus, Simon the Leper, and Simon the Tanner

As related above, it is well known that Mary Magdalene was a constant companion of Jesus Christ. This is attested to by the New Testament and more specifically by various apocryphal narratives. She was the woman who anointed Christ in the house in Bethany of Simon the Leper. It is, however, inferred that this was also the house of Mary Magdalene, Martha, and Lazarus, which was the house of Simon Boethus. Whence, then, the association with a leper?

Simon Boethus had a son called Simon Cantheras, whom Agrippa instated as high priest around 41 to 44 CE.[30] In the first mention of this high priest by Josephus, it is, however, clear that the name Cantheras applied to Simon Boethus himself, the father of the family and specifically the father of Mariamne II, whom Herod had married, and not to his son of the same name:

> He [Agrippa] removed Theophilus, the son of Ananus, from the high priesthood, and bestowed that honor of his on **Simon the son of Boethus, whose name was also Cantheras whose daughter King Herod married**, as I have related above. Simon therefore, had the [high] priesthood with his brothers, and with his father[31]

Simon Boethus (Cantheras) therefore appears to have been reinstated as high priest for a short period of time. The name Cantheras must certainly be a corruption of the Latin word *cantharus*,[32] which means 'a tankard' or 'a large goblet with handles,' and in numerous references to this priest, his name is indeed spelled Cantharus.[33] Another name given to Simon Cantheras was Simon *Qathros*,[34,35] which means 'a harp'[36,37] and is similar to the Hebrew word for a lyre or a harp,

qiythâros.[38] The nicknames given to Simon Boethus suggest that he was a man who loved wine, (women), and song, to use the modern expression.

Returning to Simon the Leper, the second part of his name most likely stems from a corruption of the name Cantharus to *Cancerus*. The word *cancerus* appears to be derived from the Latin word *cancer,* also spelled *canceris*,[39] meaning 'an eating or spreading sore,' such as leprosy. The bemoaned priesthood of the 'house of Kathros' may simply refer to sons of Boethus who were later appointed as high priests.

Following the 'ascension' of Christ, Simon Peter had lodged in the house of Simon the Tanner,[40] in the port city Jaffa (Joppa). Given the close association of Simon Boethus with Christ and his disciples, it is possible that this house also belonged to the wealthy Simon Boethus. The Hebrew word for leather or skin is *'ôwr,*[41] pronounced *ore*, while the phonetically identical word *'ôwr*[42] means 'to be luminous' and even 'glorious.' It is therefore possible that Simon the Glorious became Simon the Tanner. Although the majority of Christ's broad following was from the lower echelons of life, his inner circle came from the highest level of the Hebrew society and the rich and powerful. Simon Peter would not have lodged in the house of a man whose profession was to skin dead animals.

Judas Iscariot

Much has been speculated about the origins of the disciple who supposedly betrayed Christ, Judas Iscariot, often spelled *Iscariotes* in Greek and Latin. Several origins of his surname have been suggested, but none appear to have been generally accepted. These include *Kerioth*, a city in Israel,[43] and *sicarii*, the name of a group of assassins who opposed Roman rule in Israel.[44] However, a more likely explanation can be found in the Latin language.

Combining the Latin *is,*[45] meaning 'he'; *careo carere carui carituru*s,[46] meaning 'to be without, to want, or to lack which we have had'; and

otium (genitive form *otii*),[47] meaning 'ease, leisure,' results in *is-care(o)-otii*, or freely translated 'He who desires leisure.' The father of Judas Iscariot was one Simon Iscariot,[48] and *is-care-otii* would be a fitting description of Simon Boethus, who must have loved the luxurious lifestyle that wealth brings. In other words, it would seem that Simon Iscariot and Simon Boethus were the same person.

Further proof of this interpretation can be found in *The Life of Saint Matthias,*[49] in which the mother of Judas Isacriot is named as Ciborea. The Latin word *ciborium,* of which one of the forms is *ciboria*,[50] means 'a large drinking cup.' This matches the description of Simon Boethus as Cantharus, the Tankard (Simon the Drunk), whose wife was known as 'She of (belonging to) the Drunk.' Judas Iscariot would most likely have been either a much younger or much older brother of Mary Magdalene. Taking into account that there were no contraceptives available two thousand years ago, it is unlikely that Simon Boethus would have fathered only three children.

Martha

Simon Boethus was a rich man, and his daughter Martha was also known for her wealth:

> **Martha the daughter of Boethius was one of the richest women in Jerusalem**. She sent her man-servant out saying, Go and bring me some fine flour. By the time he went it was sold out.…She had taken off her shoes, but she said, I will go out and see if I can find anything to eat. Some dung stuck to her foot and she died. Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai applied to her the verse, **The tender and delicate woman among you which would not [ad]venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground**. Some report that she ate a fig left by R. Zadok, and became sick and died.… When Martha was about to die, **she brought out all her gold and silver and threw it in the street**, saying, What is

> the good of this to me, thus giving effect to the verse, They shall cast their silver in the streets.[51]

She bribed the king (Agrippa II) to appoint her husband-to-be as the next high priest, even though he had not been selected by the Sanhedrin:

> for R. Assi said: A tarkabful of denars did Martha, the daughter of Boethus give to King Jannai to nominate Joshua ben Gamala as one of the high priests.
>
> It once happened with Joshua ben Gamala that he betrothed Martha the daughter of Boethus, and the king appointed him high priest, and he, nevertheless, consummated the marriage.[52,53]

It should be mentioned that another passage in the Talmud appears to associate Martha's sister Mariamne with Joshua ben Gamla (Gamala?), but if so, this must clearly be an error:

> It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Boethus, that Joshua ben Gamla married her, and the king appointed him to be High Priest. She once went to see him and said, 'I will go and see him reading on the Day of Atonement in the Temple.' **They laid carpets for her from the door of her house to the entrance of the Temple so that her feet might not be exposed, nevertheless they were exposed**.[54]

There appears to be no record of what had become of Mariamne following her divorce from Herod the Great. The image of Martha created by the Talmud is that of a spoilt and very wealthy woman who was used to having things her way. Could this woman be the Martha of the New Testament?

In the apocryphal *The Life of Saint Martha*, we read:

> Saint Martha, hostess of our Lord Jesu Christ, **was born of a royal kindred**. Her father was named Syro and her mother Encharia. The father of her was duke of Syria and **places maritime**, and Martha with her sister possessed by the heritage of their mother three places, that was, **the castle Magdalen**, and Bethany and a part of Jerusalem.[55]

From this passage we learn the following about Martha:

- Martha and her family were linked to royalty, which was indeed the case through her sister Mariamne II, who was Herod's third wife.
- Her father appears to be linked to the maritime trade, having been in charge of 'maritime places,' which would match Simon the Tanner having had a house at Joppa.
- She and her sister were extremely wealthy (to have owned a part of Jerusalem), and Mary is linked to a castle, implying that she was a queen, likely to be Mariamne II, who lived in Herod's castle. Honorius Augustodunensis (flourished between the years 1106 and 1135 CE[56]) describes Mary Magdalen as '**Mary of Magdala castle who, betrayed by her husband, fled to Jerusalem to become a filthy and common prostitute, and who, regardless of her birth, and of her own free will, founded a brothel of sin**, a temple of demons, and seven devils entered her.'[57] The description 'betrayed by her husband' must refer to Herod having divorced Mariamne II, while the brothel she founded links her to Magi-de-lena, the brothel-keeper of Simon Magus.

There appears to be no Latin equivalent of the names Syro and Encharia, although phonetically similar words do exist. Syro could either refer to Syria, or to the Latin *sero*, *serere*,[58] which means 'to sow or plant.' The wealth of the rich appears to have been measured by

the amount of food they possessed or were able to supply, and that food would have included grain. Another Latin word similar to Syro is *sirus, siri*,[59] meaning 'a corn pit,' an underground cave used to store corn. This would have the same connotation as *sero*, both of which would have been a fitting description of the wealthy Simon Boethus. The name Syro could also be related to two place names, Syros[60] (Sira), an island in the Aegean Sea, or the country Syria,[61] but there is no obvious reason why this would be the case.

The Latin words *encardia encardiae*[62] are phonetically similar to Encharia and describe a precious stone 'having in it the form of a heart.' In *The Acts of Peter*, the apostle confronts Eubula, the consort of Simon Magus, and wins her over for Christ. As discussed in section 6.3, the *bulla*, which was heart-shaped, was synonymous with Mariamne of Boethus (Mary Magdalene), who was renowned for her beauty. It therefore seems that both she and her mother were known to have worn heart-shaped ornaments or jewellery.

In *The Life of Saint Martha*, Martha is also called Emorissa. The Latin words *emo, emere*[63] mean 'to purchase' or 'to bribe,' and the word *risus* [64] means 'laughter' or 'jeering, ridicule,' suggesting that *Emorissa* may refer to Martha of Boethus, who had offered a laughable bribe to Agrippa II to get her future husband, Joshua ben Gamala, selected as high priest. Martha died during the siege of Jerusalem, when many of its inhabitants starved to death.

It should be noted that Simon Boethus had another son called Matthias,[65] who, given the close relationship between Christ and the Boethus family, may very well have been the Matthias selected as the replacement for Judas.[66]

7.2 Mary Magdalene with the Beautiful Hair

Mary Magdalene must have had long, flowing hair to have been able to use it to wipe Christ's feet. As discussed in section 2.4, the Talmud mistakenly refers to the mother of Christ as having been called a dresser of women's hair. Eubula was ordered by Peter to tidy her hair:

> Eubula, rise up from your bed and compose your face, **put up your hair and put on a dress that becomes you**…[67]

and in the story of the Martyrdom of Saints, Perpetua and her slave Felicity (Felicitas), two martyrs who supposedly died in the third century, Perpetua is paraded before the crowds, yet:

> when she saw her tunic torn from her side, she drew it over her as a veil for her middle, rather mindful of her modesty than her suffering. Then she was called for again, **and bound up her dishevelled hair; for it was not becoming for a martyr to suffer with dishevelled hair**, lest she should appear to be mourning in her glory…[68]

It is a definite possibility that the story of Saint Perpetua is simply another version of the Perpetua who saw Paul before his execution (see section 7.4). Both the names Perpetua and Thecla have been shown to be synonyms for Mary Magdalene, and Thecla promised Paul that she would cut her hair (see section 6.3). All indications are, therefore, that Mary Magdalene must have been admired for her beautiful hair. In the *Vita*, believed to have been written by either Rabanus Maurus, a Frankish Benedictine monk, or an unknown Cistercian monk, she is described as:

> Resplendent in the marvellous beauty of her body, excessively lovely…her charming visage, **her marvellous hair**, her most gracious air, her sweet spirit…[69]

As quoted earlier, we find a peculiar reference to Miriam (Mary), the daughter of Boethus, in the Talmud:

> It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Boethus, that Joshua b. Gamla married her, and the king appointed him to be

> High Priest.…May I not live to behold the consolation [of Zion] if I did not see **the Romans bind her hair to the tails of the horses of Arabs and make her run from Jerusalem to Lydda**, and I quoted this verse in connection with her, 'The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness.'[70]

It was not Miriam but her sister Martha who married Joshua ben Gamla, who was appointed high priest.[71,72] This passage suggests that Mary must have had long hair; otherwise, it would not have been possible to tie her to the horses. Why the Romans would have inflicted such a cruel punishment upon such a tender and delicate woman can be understood from the perspective that she had become the companion of Christ and his followers, who were enemies of the Jews and the Romans because of their violence.

Another strange remark as found in the books concerning a King Abgar reads:

> In the year three hundred and forty-five, in the month of the latter Tishrin, **Marath Mary** went out from her house, and went to the sepulchre of Christ: because every day she used to go and weep there. But the Jews immediately after the death of Christ seized the sepulchre, and heaped great stones at the door of it. And over the sepulchre and Golgotha they set guards, and commanded them that, if any one should go and pray at the sepulchre or at Golgotha, he should immediately be put to death.…And the guards went in and said to the priests: Mary cometh in the evening and in the morning, and prayeth there. **And there was a commotion in Jerusalem on account of Marath Mary**.[73]

The year 345 seems to refer to the generally accepted date of Christ's crucifixion (311 BCE + 345 = 34 CE, see section 4.1). In the notes to the

text,[74] Mary appears to be identified as Mary, the mother of Christ, and Marath is interpreted as:

> 'My Lady' or 'Madam' (= *mea domina*): it is the feminine form of 'Mar.'

In the Gospel of John, it is recorded that it was Mary Magdalene, and she only, who visited Christ's tomb and found it empty.[75] Unless it was common knowledge that Mariamne I had not been executed and had returned with her son to Judea, which is doubtful, there would have been no reason why she would have sparked a commotion in Jerusalem. Mariamne II would, however, have been very well known, and her persistent presence at the grave and her involvement with Christ would have caused a huge stir in Jerusalem.

The above interpretation of the name Marath is hardly convincing, but the phonetically similar Hebrew word *mârat*,[76] which means 'to polish, make bald (the head) or to pluck off (the hair)' would make sense if Mary Magdalene had been tied to the tails of horses and was being dragged along by her hair. She would have been an elderly woman when she had been captured (see 'The Age of Mary Magdalene' above), and if she had been pulled by horses, most of her hair would certainly have been pulled from her scalp.

The Talmudic account of Mariamne being dragged by her hair by horses of the Romans strongly suggests that she was executed by them. We have to turn to legends of famous female Christian martyrs to learn more about how she was killed.

7.3 Saints Agatha and Epicharis—the Captured Mary Magdalene

If Mary Magdalene had indeed been captured and executed by the Romans, one would expect the event to have been recorded in Christian tradition. However, there are no records to be found that mention her by that name. If she had been captured only in the late fifties or even sixties of the first century, it is very likely that few would have remembered her true identity. There are, however,

other records of female Christian martyrs who were executed in Rome.

In *The Life of Saint Agatha* (of Sicily),[77] it is related how a beautiful young virgin called Agatha refused the sexual advances of a Roman provost (prefect) called **Quintianus**. He retaliated by ordering her to be drawn and stretched on a tree, to be tortured, and eventually for her breasts to be drawn and cut off. Some traditions relate that she was first **sent to a brothel** (the house of 'Aphrodisia' and her daughters) before being subjected to prolonged torture. She courageously continued to profess her belief in Christ, regardless of the torture she had to endure. Saint Peter appeared in the form of an ancient nobleman and healed her breasts, but she eventually succumbed to her injuries in prison. Saint Agatha is described as a virgin who was '**right fair, noble (of) body** and of heart, and was **rich of goods**,' or in other words, she came from a rich and important family.

That her real name was most probably not Agatha is suggested by the long discourse in *The Life of Saint Agatha* that was offered in an attempt to explain why she had been known by that particular name:

> **Agatha is said of agios**, which is as much to say as holy, **and theos, that is God**, that is to say the saint of God: and, as Chrysostom saith, three things make a man holy, which three were perfectly in her; that is cleanness of heart, the presence of the Holy Ghost, and plenty of good manners. Or she is said of A, which is to say without, and of geos, earth, and of theos, God, as a goddess without earth, that is without earthly love. Or she is said of aga, that is to say speaking, and of thau, that is perfection, that is that she was speaking and accomplishing much perfectly, and that appeareth well in her answers. Or she is said of agath, that is service, and thaas, sovereign, which is as sovereign service, and because she said that servage is **sovereign noblesse**. Or she is said of aga, that is solemn, and of thau, **that is perfection**, for the perfection was right solemn, like as it appeareth by the angels that buried her.

In the story of Agatha, the provost interrogated her about her lineage, suggesting that she was of notable and possibly noble descent. Saint Agatha is claimed to have originated from Catania in Sicily and to have died around 250 CE ('And anon after she gave up the ghost, and rendered her soul, the year of our Lord two hundred and fifty-three in the time of Decius, the emperor of Rome'). Decius was the emperor of Rome from 249 to 251 CE and issued harsh edicts for the suppression of Christianity.[78] The mention of Chrysostom indicates that the document was written later than 407 CE, the year in which Chrysostom died.[79] Despite the late recording of the legend, evidence exists that suggests that she was a contemporary of Paul and Peter, as Peter appeared to Agatha in the form of an ancient nobleman. Unless they were imprisoned at the same time, which was not the case, the so-called healing of Agatha by Peter, if anything, only suggests that they were contemporaries, possibly working together. The document was written more than 150 years after the fact, which allows the possibility that the author of *The Life of Saint Agatha* mistook Nero for Decius, both having persecuted Christians.

Saint Agatha is believed to be a protectress against fire and supposedly protected Catania during eruptions of Mount Etna.[80] As such, she would match the person of Stata Mater, the companion of Vulcan and the goddess who protected against fire (see section 2.4). This association (both were protectresses against fire) would seemingly equate Agatha with Mariamne I, the mother of Christ (she was known as Stata

Mater), but Agatha should rather be equated with Mary Magdalene (also a Mariamne), because of her death at the hands of the Romans.

In the *Annals* of Tacitus, we read of a conspiracy against Nero around 65 CE:

> The origin of the conspiracy was not in Piso's personal ambition. But I could not easily narrate who first planned it, or whose prompting inspired a scheme into which so many entered. That the leading spirits were…Flavius Scaevinus and Afranius **Quintianus**, on the other hand, both **of senatorian rank**, contrary to what was expected of them, undertook the beginning of this daring crime.… **Quintianus, infamous for his effeminate vice**, had been satirised by Nero in a lampoon, and was bent on avenging the insult. So, while they dropped hints among themselves or among their friends about the emperor's crimes, the approaching end of empire, and the importance of choosing someone to rescue the State in its distress, they associated with them.…But their mainstay, it was thought, was **Faenius Rufus**, the commander of the guard, a man of esteemed life and character,…And so, when the conspirators were assured by his own repeated language that the commander of the praetorian guard had come over to their side, they once more eagerly discussed the time and place of the fatal deed.…Meanwhile, as they hesitated in prolonged suspense between hope and fear, a certain **Epicharis** (how she informed herself is uncertain, as she had never before had a thought of anything noble) **began to stir and upbraid the conspirators. Wearied at last of their long delay, she endeavoured, when staying in Campania, to shake the loyalty of the officers of the**

fleet at Misenum, and to entangle them in a guilty complicity. She began thus. There was a captain in the fleet, **Volusius Proculus**, who had been one of Nero's instruments in his mother's murder, and had not, as he thought, been promoted in proportion to the greatness of his crime. Either, **as an old acquaintance of the woman, or on the strength of a recent intimacy**, he divulged to her his services to Nero and their barren result to himself, adding complaints, and his determination to have vengeance, should the chance arise.…Epicharis accordingly said more, '…Only let Proculus gird himself to do his part and bring over to their side his bravest soldiers, and then look for an adequate recompense.' The conspirators' names, however, she withheld. Consequently the information of Proculus was useless, even though he reported what he had heard to Nero. **For Epicharis being summoned** and confronted with the informer easily silenced him, unsupported as he was by a single witness. **But she was herself detained in custody**, for Nero suspected that even what was not proved to be true, was not wholly false.…Then Scaevinus too,…revealed the other conspirators. Of these, Lucanus, Quintianus, and Senecio long persisted in denial.

Nero, meanwhile, remembering that Epicharis was in custody on the information of Volusius Proculus, and assuming that a woman's frame must be unequal to the agony, ordered her to be torn on the rack. But neither the scourge nor fire, nor the fury of the men as they increased the torture that they might not be a woman's scorn, overcame her positive denial of the charge. Thus the first day's inquiry was futile. On the morrow, as she was being dragged back on a chair to the same torments (for with her

> limbs all dislocated she could not stand), she tied a band, which she had stript off her bosom, in a sort of noose to the arched back of the chair, put her neck in it, and then straining with the whole weight of her body, wrung out of her frame its little remaining breath. All the nobler was the example set by a freedwoman at such a crisis in screening strangers and those whom she hardly knew, when free-born men, Roman knights, and senators, yet unscathed by torture, betrayed, every one, his dearest kinsfolk.…and Nero was more and more alarmed, though he had fenced his person with a largely augmented guard.[81]

The historian Polyaenus[82] also records the torture of a woman called Epicharis by Nero in order to extract information from her regarding the plot to assassinate him. Polyaenus, however, refers to her as the mistress of Mela, a brother of Seneca, and ends his account with the statement that **Nero was outwitted by the prostitute (Epicharis), who had killed herself**.

The parallels between the legends of Agatha and Epicharis are too numerous to be mere coincidence:

- In both legends we have a highly ranked Roman official called Quintianus, who was involved with its leading female protagonist.
- Tacitus's description of Afranius Quintianus reads *'mollitia corporis infamis,'* the words respectively meaning 'softness, gentleness, an aptness to be overcome by temptation, wantonness, effeminacy, delicacy';[83] 'of the body, that has a body';[84] and 'ignominious, ill spoken of.'[85] It seems that he was someone who liked to indulge in sexual pleasures, rather than being an effeminate or gentle man. In both legends we therefore have a Quintianus who was known for his sexual endeavours.

- Agatha supposedly originated from Catania in Sicily, whereas Epicharis was active in Campania, both regions being part of Italy.
- Epicharis began to stir the conspirators and shake the loyalty of royal officers. The name Agatha can be assumed to be of Latin origin as well and most likely was a corrupted form of *agito, agitare*,[86] which means 'to drive, agitate, to shake, or to trouble.' This description (and hence the name?) matches the activities of Epicharis as related by Tacitus. To those who did not know her origins, she may simply have been known by the nickname **Agita**, or 'She who stirred.'
- Both women were described as prostitutes. (Agatha supposedly worked as a prostitute for a month, and Polyaenus refers to Epicharis by that description.) This was the infamous epithet of Mary Magdalene as Simon Magus's Helen. The claim that Agatha was forced into prostitution must be an attempt by the author of this legend to rationalise why she would have been known as a prostitute.
- Both women were stretched and tortured, and both stories involve their naked breasts.
- Both women could not be broken regardless of the torture they were subjected to.
- Both women had been imprisoned and had died in prison by suicide. Epicharis's suicide is documented unambiguously, while the manner in which Agatha died implies suicide:

> Quintianus redoubled the bruit of the people, and went out behind and **commanded that she should be remised in prison. When she came into the prison she joined her hands**, holding them up to heavenward, and said in praying: Lord God Jesu Christ which hast created me of nought, and sith my youth hast kept me and hast suffered

> me to live well in my youth, which hast taken from mine heart the love of the world and hast made me to overcome the torments, and hast lent me patience among the pains, **I pray thee that thou take my spirit**, for it is time that thou make me to depart from this world and to come to thy mercy. This orison and prayer made she on high tofore many persons. **And anon after she gave up the ghost**, and rendered her soul, the year of our Lord two hundred and fifty-three in the time of Decius, the emperor of Rome.

It is perhaps no coincidence that in *The Story of Perpetua*, it is related that after she was tortured by Nero, a 'great stone' was tied to her neck, and she was thrown off a cliff. Both she and Epicharis were, therefore, killed by something around the neck. Those who recorded Agatha's death most likely omitted her suicide on purpose.

- Agatha's Quintianus 'died of an evil death,' while Epicharis's was either executed or forced to commit suicide.[87]

Consequently, it seems highly probable that the story of Agatha was based on the story of Epicharis, or in other words, they were one and the same person. Although Epicharis is not linked to Christ by Tactitus, the list of Roman Catholic saints includes a Saint Epicharis of Rome:

> Sept. 27, Matron, M. End of 3rd or beginning of 4th century. In the persecution of Diocletian, she was beaten with loaded scourges by four lictors, who were killed by angels; she was then condemned to be beheaded. When sentence was pronounced, water gushed out of a stone under her feet. Her head was then struck off by the sword of the executioner. She was buried by Felix, a senator, and miraculous cures were wrought at her tomb. The *Menology of the*

> *Emperor Basil* says Rome was the place of her martyrdom, but the compilers of the *AA.SS.* think it more likely that it occurred at Constantinople.[88]

It has, in fact, been speculated that Epicharis may have been 'a Christianised projection of the heroic Epicharis who had taken part in the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero.'[89] In other words, this Epicharis may very well have been the Epicharis of Pisonian conspiracy. The Roman senator called Felix, who had buried her body, may have been Felix, the nemesis of Josephus's Egyptian (Christ, Paul), who served as procurator of Judea until 58 CE but most likely continued his political career as a Roman senator. Alternatively, he may simply have been remembered as a high-ranking Roman official. The water gushing out of a stone under her feet is similar to the milk that gushed out of the neck of Paul when he was beheaded.

The name Epicharis may have several origins, the most likely being a concatenation of the Greek prefix *epi*,[90] meaning 'over, upon' (also used as such in Latin[91]), and the Latin word *charis*,[92] meaning 'grace,' which would result in something like 'Grace upon (her).' In context it may refer to the grace of Mariamne II, who was so delicate and tender that the soles of her feet never touched the ground. Another possible interpretation of the name Epicharis is that it could be a derivative of the Latin word ***epichysis***,[93] meaning '**a large vessel out of which wine was poured into cups or glasses**.'

The Latin word ***epicurus*** (*epicorus*)[94] means 'one that gives himself wholly to pleasure,' which would be an apt description of Simon Boethus, the father of Mariamne II, as discussed in section 7.1. It is shown in that section that Simon Boethus was also known as **Cantharus** (the Tankard), and his wife, **Ciborea**, as the **Drinking Cup**. Figuratively speaking, that which flows out of a large drinking vessel may denote a child, and the name **Epicharis therefore may suggest that this woman was a daughter of the Tankard and the Drinking Cup**. The only daughter of Simon Boethus who was

intimately involved with Jesus Christ was Mariamne, the former wife of Herod, who was known to the disciples as Mary Magdalene. She would indeed have been of '**sovereign service**' as recorded in *The Life of Saint Agatha*. As already pointed out, Mary Magdalene was a woman of great beauty and great wealth, as was Agatha.

One aspect in which the misadventures of Mariamne II do not match the narratives of Agatha and Epicharis is where they were captured. As related earlier, Mariamne was seen being dragged by her hair tied to the tails of horses and **forced to run from Jerusalem to Lydda**. This account suggests that Mariamne was young enough to perform such a feat, which she could not have been in the year 65 CE. Assuming that she had been born around 17 BCE, she would have been around eighty-two years old when Epicharis was captured by the Romans. Unless the author of the Mariamne narrative traveled with the Romans from Jerusalem to Lydda, one must assume that he had perhaps witnessed her being tied to the tails of horses and being dragged away in Jerusalem, but no farther. The road from Jerusalem to Lydda would eventually have ended at Joppa (Jappa), an ancient port city and now part of present-day Tel Aviv, as shown in figure 7.1.

Tacitus does not relate exactly how Epicharis was arrested, only that she was summoned and then detained. She could very well have been arrested in Jerusalem, taken to Joppa, and sailed by boat to Campania. If Proculus had indeed been an earlier acquaintance of Epicharis, as Tacitus suspected, he most likely would have known exactly where to contact and locate her. Judea was under Roman rule, and a simple order from Rome would have ensured her arrest. The harsh treatment she received indicates that she must have been high on the Roman 'most wanted' list, and being Christ's mistress would have ensured her such notoriety. She would have been taken to Joppa (or Akko, see below) for one purpose only—to be taken to Rome.

Figure 7.1. Mariamne's route to Rome

7.4 Mariamne II and Vibia Perpetua

That Mariamne II was captured is supported by a reference in the Talmud to Miriam, the daughter of Boethus (called Boethus Nahtum

in the original text, but also translated as Tanhum) having been captured and ransomed at the port city of Acco (see also Baltz[95] and Eisenman[96]):

> It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Boethus Tanhum, that she was taken captive and was ransomed at Acco. The people bought her a shift, and when she went to wash it in the sea, a wave came and carried it away. They bought her another, and when she went to wash it in the sea a wave came and carried it away. They wished to buy her still another, but she said to them, 'Leave the Collector to collect His debt.' **When she justified the heavenly decree against herself**, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave a hint to the sea which restored her garments to her.[97]
>
> It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Tanhum, **that she was taken captive with her seven sons**. The emperor took and placed them in the innermost of seven rooms. He had the eldest brought and said to him, 'Prostrate yourself before the image.' He answered, 'God forbid! I will not prostrate myself before an image.' 'Why?' the king asked. 'Because it is thus written in our Torah, *I am the Lord thy God*. He immediately had him taken out and slain.[98]

Sons two to six were killed in similar fashion. The text continues with the seventh son, the youngest, also being brought before the king. He likewise refused to worship an image and was ordered to be put to death by the king. His mother begged:

> 'By the life of your head, O emperor, give me my son that I may embrace and kiss him.' They gave him to her, **and she bared her breasts and suckled him**. She said to the king, 'By the life of your head, O emperor, put me to death first and then slay him.'…He immediately ordered him to be slain. The mother threw herself upon her child and embraced and kissed him.…While she was embracing and kissing him, the king gave an order and they killed him in her arms. When he had been slain, the Sages calculated the age of that child and found that he was two years, six months, and six and a half hours old.

Another version of the death of her seven sons reads:

> Rab Judah, however, said that this refers to the woman and her seven sons. They brought the first before the Emperor and said to him, Serve the idol. He said to them: It is written in the Law, I am the Lord thy God. So they led him away and killed him. They then brought the second before the Emperor and said to him, Serve the idol. He replied: It is written in the Torah, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. So they led him away and killed him.…They were leading him [the last] away to kill him when his mother said: Give him to me that I may kiss him a little. She said to him: My son, go and say to your father Abraham, Thou didst bind one [son to the] altar, but I have bound seven altars. **Then she also went up on to a roof and threw herself down and was killed.** A voice thereupon came forth from heaven saying, A joyful mother of children.[99]

There are several important aspects of this account to be noted:

- The Miriam in question is described as the daughter of Boethus Nahtum. The second part of his name must certainly be a combination of the Hebrew words *nâ'âh*,[100] meaning 'a home, house' and *tum'âh*[101] (pronounced *toom-aw'*), meaning 'uncleanness,' sometimes used to refer to sexual 'uncleanness'. In other words,

she was known as Miriam of Boethus's whorehouse. This was the nickname by which Mary Magdalene had become known.

- It is stated unequivocally that Miriam had been captured and traded at a harbour. It is unlikely that Miriam would have been taken from Lydda to Akko (see figure 7.1), and Joppa may simply have been mistaken for Akko, another port city.
- The episode about Mariam's shift (a long undergarment) being washed away in the sea and eventually being returned is ridiculous if taken at face value but may simply indicate that this Miriam was taken off by ship, dressed in only her underwear.
- Baltz links the repentant Miriam, whose garments were afterwards returned to her by the sea, to the sinful Mary Magdalene of Luke. Of particular importance is the reference to this Miriam having had seven sons, some of whom (if not all of them) had been killed by an emperor, who could only have been an emperor of Rome. The seven sons are reminiscent of the seven demons exorcised from Mary Magdalene, as related by Luke. The statement that the sons of Miriam had been executed by the Emperor confirms that Mariamne II had more than one son (the one she had by Herod), and these sons were executed by the Romans. These executions match the 'martyrdom' of many of the apostles of Christ, at least four or five of them who had been brothers of Christ (see tables 3.1 and 3.2).
- The killing of the last son, who was not yet three years old, and the subsequent suicide by the mother (Miriam), who had jumped off the roof of a building, seems to point to Mariamne I, who had threatened to jump off the roof of a building (see chapter 2) to escape from Herod the Great and whom everyone would have assumed to have been killed along with her illegitimate son. It may also refer to Josephus, the youngest of all the brothers of Christ, who may have been assumed by some to have died at the hands of the Romans.

The martyrdom suffered by Paul's Perpetua (see section 6.3) is echoed in a document called *The Martyrdom (Passion) of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*.[102] The text begins:

> The young catechumens, Revocatus and his fellow-servant **Felicitas**, Saturninus and **Secundulus**, were apprehended. And among them also was **Vibia Perpetua**, respectably born, liberally educated, a married matron, having a father and mother and two brothers, one of whom, like herself, was a catechumen, and a son, an infant at the breast. She herself was about twenty-two years of age. From this point onward she shall herself narrate the whole course of her martyrdom, as she left it described by her own hand and with her own mind.

Perpetua was for some time allowed to keep her infant with her in prison. A vision in which she was forced to fight '**a certain Egyptian, horrible in appearance, with his backers**,' whom she conquered, made it clear to her that she would be fighting the devil. Other martyrs who died before her were known as **Jocundus**, Saturus, Artaxius, and **Quintus**. In the end, Perpetua, who was ever aware of the appearance of her hair (she 'bound up her dishevelled hair'), died by putting to her throat the wavering sword of the young gladiator who was to kill her. The narrator concludes that 'Possibly such a woman could not have been slain unless she herself had willed it, because she was feared by the impure spirit.' Based on the mention of a proconsul Minucius Timinianus and the birthday of Geta Caesar (two historical persons), the events can be dated to 203 CE or 206–209 CE.[103]

The story of the martyrdom of Perpetua matches the other martyrdom narratives related above in several respects:

- The lead protagonists in *The Story of Perpetua* (and Paul) and *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* have the same name.

- Perpetua conquered an ugly Egyptian and his backers, which can only refer to Christ, as he was known to the Jews. Mary Magdalene was the one woman who had won the affection of Christ and had effectively 'conquered' him.
- Perpetua is associated with an infant, as is Miriam of Boethus Nahtum.
- Perpetua's concern about her hair and appearance matches Mary Magdalene, who had been known for her beautiful hair.
- It is hinted that Perpetua committed suicide (put the sword to her own throat), as did Epicharis and Agatha.
- In *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity*, Vibia Perpetua is mentioned with nine other martyrs: **Felicity**, **Secundulus**, **Jocundus**, Revocatus, Saturninus, Artaxius, Quintus, Saturus, and Rusticus. Her deceased brother Dinocrates is also brought into the narrative. We learn of another group of martyrs of similar names, namely those who suffered martyrdom along with **Epictetus**, who is believed to have died around 250 CE.[104] Those who died with him were Felix, (*felix*, ***felicis***, a Latin adjective meaning 'lucky'[105]), **Secundus**, **Jucundus**, **Vitalis**, and seven other companions. The first three names in the two lists are almost identical, and the number of martyrs is eleven and twelve, respectively, if Perpetua's brother is included. Perpetua's full name is given as either Vibia Perpetua or Vivia Perpetua.[106] There does not seem to be a meaningful interpretation of the Latin word *vibia*, but *vivia* appears to be related to *vivus, viva, vivum*, which means 'alive' or 'living.'[107] Assuming *vivia* to be the correct version of this name, it would match *vitalis*, which means 'of life.'[108] It would then appear that the story of the death of Perpetua is linked to the story of the martyrdom of Epictetus, and that Vivia (Vitalis) and Perpetua were in fact two persons. If that were the case, both stories would involve eleven to twelve martyrs, of which at least four names are similar.

- There is one historic Epictetus of note, who just happens to be linked to the Pisonian conspiracy. Epictetus was a Greek sage and philosopher who was a slave to Epaphroditus, a famous freedman who was the secretary of Nero.[109] Epictetus studied Stoic philosophy under Musonius Rufus, who was one of the conspirators in the Pisonian conspiracy[110] and would most likely have known Epicharis. Epictetus obtained his freedom at some point and taught philosophy in Rome until 95 CE, when he and all other philosophers were expelled from Rome by Domitian. If Epicharis was indeed Mariamne II, as argued above, Christians may have remembered that Epictetus was sympathetic to their movement, and that he had died (disappeared from the scene), supposedly because of his belief in Christ. The author of the martyrdom narrative may have introduced Minucius Timinianus and Geta Caesar simply to lend authenticity to his narrative. The legends concerning Agatha, Perpetua, and Epictetus all appear to be garbled versions of the actual events that took place ca. 65 CE.
- Two more Perpetuas are remembered in legend.[111] The first Perpetua was the wife of Simon Peter. She was put to death shortly before Simon Peter, who, as Simon bar Gioras, was captured in 70 CE (see section 9.1). This Perpetua would have died around 65 CE, some five years before Simon Peter. The name of Peter's wife is elsewhere recorded as Concordia, who reportedly 'was the daughter of Aristobulos, otherwise Zebedee, and of Salome. Zebedee, according to this legend, was brother of Saint Barnabas and brother-in-law of Andrew, who married the sister of James, John, and Concordia.' In other words, Perpetua is again placed in the time of Christ. If Peter's wife was indeed related to the other apostles as claimed here, it would confirm that virtually all of Christ's apostles were family members.
- The second Perpetua was baptised by Peter but was married to a man called Africanus. It would seem that all of these females

named Perpetua can in one way or another be linked to Simon Peter.

Epicharis was captured in 65 CE, and if she had indeed seen Paul just before his execution in her capacity as Perpetua (Plautilla), it would mean that the Romans had kept him alive that long. Paul (Christ) would have been about ninety-three years old when he was executed, an improbable but not impossible age given the longevity of his family. Alternatively, the legends may simply reflect that she had been taken to and died in the same place as Paul.

The above arguments link Agatha and Epicharis to Mary Magdalene, but the probable reason for her involvement with a Roman senator needs to be addressed.

7.5 The Murder of Agrippina, Nero's Mother

If Agatha and Epicharis were indeed one and the same person, Christians would be linked through the latter to the Roman captain Volusius Proculus. Tacitus speculates that Epicharis had become involved with the captain of the fleet either as an old acquaintance, or that he had visited her presumably as a prostitute. **Volusius Proculus was a key participant in Nero's plot to have his mother murdered**, a crime that was committed in March of 59 CE.[112] Were the followers of Christ behind this attack?

Agrippina's death was described by three historians of that era: Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio. According to Tacitus, Nero had become involved with a noble woman called Poppaea Sabina, whom he wanted to marry despite already being married to Octavia. Seeing his mother Agrippina as an obstacle, he decided to murder her by building a boat that would sink. Brief summaries of these three accounts follow[113]:

Tacitus's account:

> According to Tacitus, in 58, Nero became involved with the noble woman Poppaea Sabina. With the reasoning

> that a divorce from his wife, Octavia, and a marriage to Poppaea was not politically feasible with Agrippina alive, Nero decided to kill Agrippina. Yet, Nero did not marry Poppaea until 62, calling into question this motive. Additionally, Suetonius reveals that Poppaea's husband, Otho, was not sent away by Nero until after Agrippina's death in 59, making it highly unlikely that already married Poppaea would be pressing Nero. Some modern historians theorize that Nero's decision to kill Agrippina was prompted by her plotting to set Gaius Rubellius Plautus (Nero's maternal second cousin) on the throne.
>
> Tacitus claims that Nero considered poisoning or stabbing her but felt these methods were too difficult and suspicious, so he settled on building a **self-sinking boat**. Though aware of the plot, Agrippina embarked on this boat and was nearly crushed by a collapsing lead ceiling only to be saved by the side of a sofa breaking the ceiling's fall. Though the collapsing ceiling missed Agrippina, it crushed her attendant who was outside by the helm. The boat failed to sink from the lead ceiling, so **the crew then sank the boat**, but **Agrippina swam to shore**. Her friend, Acerronia Polla, was attacked **by oarsmen while still in the water** and was either bludgeoned to death or drowned. Agrippina **was met at the shore by crowds of admirers**. News of Agrippina's survival reached Nero so he sent three assassins to kill her.[114]

Suetonius's account:

> According to Suetonius, Nero was annoyed at his mother being too watchful and tried three times to poison Agrippina, but she took the antidotes in time and survived. He then tried to crush her with a mechanical ceiling over her bed at her residence. After this failed, he devised

> a collapsible boat, which would either have its cabin fall in or become shipwrecked. Nero then ordered captains of a different boat to ram this boat while Agrippina was aboard. Nero heard **Agrippina survived the wreck** so he ordered her to be executed and framed it as a suicide.[115]

Cassius Dio's account:

> The tale of Cassius Dio is also somewhat different. It starts again with Poppaea as the motive of the murder. In this tale, Nero designed a ship that would open at the bottom while at sea. Agrippina was put aboard and after the bottom of the ship opened up, she fell into the water. **Agrippina swam to shore** so Nero sent an assassin to kill her. Nero then claimed Agrippina plotted to kill him and committed suicide. Her reputed last words, uttered as the assassin was about to strike, were 'Smite my womb,' the implication here being she wished to be destroyed first in that part of her body that had given birth to so 'abominable a son.'[116]

The murder of Agrippina at the hands of a man closely associated with Agatha opens the possibility that she, too, may have been involved in that earlier crime.

Plan B—Attack the Enemy at Home

As discussed in section 5.2, Jesus Christ, better known to the Jews as 'the Egyptian,' had led an insurrection against the Romans. This failed, and Christ's army of savages was decimated by Felix. However, 'the Egyptian' escaped, and one has to consider what he would have done following the defeat of his forces. It is unthinkable that he would simply have disappeared from the scene, never to be heard of again.

The most likely scenario is that with all hope of driving the Romans from Israel lost, he would have resolved to attack the enemy on home soil, where it would hurt the most.

There exists possible evidence that Christ began influencing anti-Roman sentiments in Rome as early as 19 CE, a year or two before his crucifixion. Tiberius expelled the Jews from Rome in 19 CE for conflicting reasons, as reported by Roman historians. Significant, though, is the possibility that the Jews had become a disturbing element in Rome, although this theory does not appear to be generally accepted.[117] The expulsion of Jews from Rome in the year 19 CE could not previously be linked to Christ, as according to traditional theory, he would have been between twenty and twenty-four years old, long before he supposedly started preaching in Israel at the age of thirty. The expulsion of the Jews in 19 CE, however, coincides with the rise in popularity of Christ during the final years before his crucifixion as presented in this treatise.

A second expulsion of the Jews from Rome occurred under Claudius,[118] who ruled during the period from 41 to 54 CE:

> Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.[119]

If indeed pertaining to Christ, as is generally assumed, the accusation clearly states that this Chrestus was **the instigator of the uprising**, rather than the uprising having been **about** him, as rationalised by Christian apologists.[120] It is during this era that Christ's uprising would have been gathering momentum in Israel and the surrounding areas, and these anti-Roman sentiments would have spilled over into Rome. If Orosius is to be believed, this expulsion of the Jews occurred during the ninth year of the reign of Claudius (ca. 49 CE).[121] Paul was arrested about three years later, around 52 CE. That the expulsion of the Jews must have occurred before 52 CE is attested to in

the Acts of the Apostles by the mention of some of the expelled Jews making contact with Paul.[122]

It appears then that Christ, under the alias of Paul, continued his subversive activities in Rome, the capital city of the enemy, right up to the time of his arrest in Jerusalem. The account of Paul's arrest as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles was clearly written by a Christian who intended to counter the allegations leveled against Paul.

Of particular interest is the fanciful account of Paul's journey to Rome as a prisoner.

Paul's Shipwreck[123]

Following his trial by Festus, Paul was taken to Rome around 58 CE on what appears to be a commercial ship chartered by the centurion who escorted him. Along the way they encountered a storm, and fearing that the boat would be driven ashore, the sailors **lowered the lifeboat** in an attempt to escape. Paul, however, warned the centurion in whose charge he had been placed against this, and the lifeboat was cut loose. **The ship ran aground and was wrecked** on a sandbar, and although the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent them from swimming to freedom, the centurion prevented them from killing Paul. **Some swam to safety**, while others reached land on planks or pieces of the ship. **The inhabitants** of Malta, the island on which they were stranded, **showed them unusual kindness** and entertained Paul and his captors.

It is extremely unlikely that a prisoner of such importance would have been sent to Rome on a chartered merchant vessel. It would appear instead that Christians received news of an attempt on the life of Nero's mother and knew Paul to have been involved in one way or another. There are several similarities between these two events, namely: a ship that was wrecked, a lifeboat being lowered (oarsmen), and the survivors swimming to shore and being

welcomed by those on the beach. Although this would be true of any shipwrecks near the shore, it is dubious whether Paul was involved in such an incident, and one then has to ask why Paul was linked to this event.

The story of Paul's shipwreck appears to be an adaptation of the attempt on the life of Agrippina by Volusius Proculus, who knew Epicharis. Furthermore, both Nero and his mother were involved with Magi (astrologers). Suetonius records that Nero had instructed Magi to perform rites for his mother's forgiveness following her murder. Agrippina had long before consulted astrologers and had actually suspected that she would one day die at the hands of her son:

> Many years before Agrippina had anticipated this end for herself and had spurned the thought. For when she consulted the astrologers about Nero, they replied that he would be emperor and kill his mother. 'Let him kill her,' she said, 'provided he is emperor.'[124]

The Magi therefore played a key role in the lives of both Nero and his mother. It is not stated where these Magi had come from, but if they were from the fabled Magi of the ancient world, Christ (Paul) would have been on excellent footing with them. With his rebel forces having been destroyed by the Romans, the only alternative left would have been to strike at the enemy at home where he felt most comfortable, and it is highly probable that he, or more likely his followers after his execution, had secretly drawn Roman officials like Volusius Proculus and also the Magi into his plot to strike at the Emperor himself.

A key factor in linking Paul and Epicharis to Mary Magdalene is the time frame in which the above events took place. Nero reigned

from 54 to 68 CE, and the murder of his mother occurred in March of 59 CE.[125] The conspiracy in which Epicharis participated is dated to around 65 CE.[126] The legend of Paul and Thecla suggests that the two were executed at the same time, which, if true, would more or less match that time frame. It is, however, possible that, although they were not executed together or even around the same time, legends placed the two deaths together in time. Epicharis as Mariamne II would have been approximately eighty-two years old when she was captured, if she had been born ca. 17 BCE, as postulated in chapter 7. Given the longevity of Joseph, the father of Christ, and of Martha, the daughter of Boethus, it is not improbable that she could have lived that long.

Josephus's Shipwreck—Coconspirator?

Both Tacitus and Cassius Dio were of the opinion that Poppaea was behind the murder of Nero's mother. Poppaea may or may not have been sympathetic towards the Jews. (Josephus calls her a religious woman,[127] but more significantly, she seemed to be particularly fond of Josephus following his shipwreck.[128]) Josephus relates that Felix had arrested certain priests who were acquaintances of Josephus and had sent them to Rome for trial. Sometime later, when he was twenty-six years old, Josephus sailed to Rome to plead on their behalf, but on the way to Rome, his ship sank in the Adriatic Sea during the night. Of the six hundred on board, only eighty survived, being picked up by another ship the next morning. He was taken to Puteoli where he befriended a Jewish actor who was a favourite of Nero and through him became acquainted with Poppaea. He pleaded with her for the release of the Jewish priests, to which she not only obliged but also sent him away with numerous gifts.

The similarities between the shipwreck accounts of Josephus and Paul have not gone unnoticed (e.g., Gnuse[129]) and include the following:

- The Roman procurator Felix is present in both accounts.
- The sinking of the ship occurred in the Adriatic Sea, beginning at night and ending the next morning.
- Both Paul and Josephus eventually passed through Puteoli.
- Both Paul and Josephus knew a person called Epaphroditus.[130,131] The most famous (or infamous) Epaphroditus of that time was the freedman and secretary of Nero, who eventually assisted Nero in his suicide.[132] Paul had visited Philippi around 49 CE[133] and had established a church in that town. He wrote his letters to the Philippians from prison, in which he mentions Epaphroditus as a brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.
- The city of Phillipi was located in ancient Macedonia and was known for its gold mines.[134] As a wealthy city, it had a privileged position on the Via Egnatia, constructed by the Romans in 2 CE as a link between Rome and the countries on the northern boundary of the Aegean Sea. It is therefore possible that Epaphroditus, as a secretary of Nero, had regularly visited Philippi and had there become acquainted with Paul before the latter's arrest. Whether Nero's Epaphroditus and Josephus's were the same person is debatable. Nero's was executed by Domitian in 95 CE, whereas the age of Josephus is not stated but only implied. Josephus dedicated his *Antiquities* to this Epaphroditus, but as it is not known when he had completed this work, it is not possible to tell when his Epaphroditus was still alive. There is no reason to believe that Josephus concluded his work on his deathbed, and Josephus would most likely have devoted his work to a well-known Roman citizen, not an obscure acquaintance.
- The time frame more or less coincides. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was sent to Rome around 58 or 59 CE. Josephus claims that he was born in 36 CE, and twenty-six years later would be around 62 to 63 CE, which is perhaps too

close to the dates of the shipwrecks of Paul and Agrippina to be mere coincidence. As discussed earlier, Josephus is sure to have lied about his ancestry and most likely about his date of birth as well. Furthermore, if, as argued above, Josephus was not only the half-brother of Christ but also the son of Mariamne II (Mary Magdalene/Epicharis), it becomes feasible for Josephus to have been involved in the plot to strike at Nero in his hometown—not to mention at his household and ultimately at his life. For all we know, Josephus may have been accused of taking part in the plot to overthrow the royal family and decades later purposely placed his shipwreck years later than the actual event.

Josephus vehemently denied the accusation brought against him by Justus of Tiberius—that he (Josephus) and the Galileans had been the instigators of the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans and Agrippa.[135] Did this include Josephus's involvement in the murder of Agrippina, or was he merely linked to the incident because of his earlier ties with Christ?

The sea route from Israel to Rome in the first century is described in the account of Paul's journey as prisoner to Rome. It began at Caesarea, while the latter part of the sea journey took place from Malta to Syracuse (50 km south of Catania), to Rhegium (present-day Reggio di Calabria),[136] and finally to Puteoli (present-day Pozzuoli) in Campania[137] (see figure 7.2). It would seem, then, that Epicharis travelled more or less the same route, except that she departed from Joppa (or Akko, i.e., a port city), and her ship had stopped over at Catania instead of Syracuse. From Catania (Saint Agatha's hometown), she was taken to Campania (Puteoli) and from there along the Via Appia[138] to Rome. If she had been paraded through the streets of these cities (as notorious enemies of the Roman state most likely would have been), it is easily understood why she would have become synonymous with these cities.

Figure 7.2. Paul's journey to Rome

If the Acts of the Apostles is to be believed, Paul was transported to Rome on board a commercial ship, guarded only by a centurion and a couple of soldiers. This is rather unlikely given Paul's status as an enemy of the state. He would have surely been accompanied by a large contingent of Roman soldiers, and at the end of the journey, they would have docked at the Roman naval base of Misenum.[139] This naval base was located close to Puteoli, and from there he would

have been taken to Rome on the Via Appia. It should also be noted that the Roman Catholic Church venerates a Saint Proculus of Puteoli (Pozzuoli),[140] who is dated to more or less the same time frame (ca. 305 CE) as Saint Agatha. There is a chance, if small, that this Proculus may be the same as the one who knew Epicharis from an earlier time but betrayed her in the end. As a final note on Paul's journey, he was accompanied by a person called Aristarchus,[141] and he was also allowed to visit some friends along the way. Both of these assertions must be regarded as fabrications by the author of the Acts of the Apostles to hide the fact that Paul was taken to Rome as a convicted criminal and enemy of the Roman state. Aristarchus had been arrested earlier for inciting an uprising[142] and was one of the followers of Christ.

It should be noted that according to the legend of Saint Agatha, Quintianus had put her in a dark prison. This would appear to be the infamous Mamertine prison in which both Simon Magus and Simon bar Gioras were said to have been incarcerated (see section 9.1). This prison was reserved for those condemned to death and enemies of the Roman state,[143] which suggests that Saint Agatha was much more than just an ordinary follower of Christ. As Mary Magdalene, a former queen of the Jews and eventual companion of Christ, she would, however, have been just that.

Simon Peter and the Shipwrecked Woman of Ashdod/Cyprus

It is perhaps no coincidence that Simon Peter is mentioned in the context of a Roman noblewoman who was shipwrecked. In *The Acts of Saint Peter*,[144] he meets a woman sitting at the gates of Ashdod, who tearfully tells him that she is a woman from the city of Rome and is 'of the daughters of kings.' She had embarked on a ship with two of her children, but en route to Athens, the ship was wrecked. Clinging to a plank, she had been washed ashore and had been sitting at the gate for two years, asking passersby for any news about her children. Her name is given as Matradora and her husband's as Justinus. In *The History of Saint Peter*,[145] she is found in Cyprus and is called Akrosya.

Her husband, a prefect of Rome, is here called Kewestos, so it is clear that the authors of these accounts did not know her real name or circumstances. It is possible, if not likely, that this story was adapted from the shipwreck that Agripinna had survived, obviously embellished with a Christian message. Matradora (Akrosya) supposedly was the mother of Saint Clement of Rome. In other words, Simon Peter can possibly be linked to the attack on Nero's mother.

7.6 The Burning of Rome

The Great Fire of Rome was a fire that broke out in ancient Rome on 19 July 64 CE.[146] It lasted for six days, and ten of the city's fourteen districts were either destroyed or suffered serious damage. The most detailed description of the burning of Rome is given by Tacitus and is worth quoting in full:

> A disaster followed, whether accidental or treacherously contrived by the emperor, is uncertain, as authors have given both accounts, worse, however, and more dreadful than any which have ever happened to this city by the violence of fire. It had its beginning in that part of the circus which adjoins the Palatine and Caelian hills, where, amid the shops containing inflammable wares, the conflagration both broke out and instantly became so fierce and so rapid from the wind that it seized in its grasp the entire length of the circus. For here there were no houses fenced in by solid masonry, or temples surrounded by walls, or any other obstacle to interpose delay. The blaze in its fury ran first through the level portions of the city, then rising to the hills, while it again devastated every place below them, it outstripped all preventive measures; so rapid was the mischief and so completely at its mercy the city, with those narrow winding passages and irregular streets, which characterised old Rome. Added to this were the

wailings of terror-stricken women, the feebleness of age, the helpless inexperience of childhood, the crowds who sought to save themselves or others, dragging out the infirm or waiting for them, and by their hurry in the one case, by their delay in the other, aggravating the confusion. Often, while they looked behind them, they were intercepted by flames on their side or in their face. Or if they reached a refuge close at hand, when this too was seized by the fire, they found that, even places, which they had imagined to be remote, were involved in the same calamity. At last, doubting what they should avoid or whither betake themselves, they crowded the streets or flung themselves down in the fields, while some who had lost their all, even their very daily bread, and others out of love for their kinsfolk, whom they had been unable to rescue, perished, though escape was open to them. **And no one dared to stop the mischief, because of incessant menaces from a number of persons who forbade the extinguishing of the flames, because again others openly hurled brands, and kept shouting that there was one who gave them authority, either seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders**.

Nero at this time was at Antium, and did not return to Rome until the fire approached his house, which he had built to connect the palace with the gardens of Maecenas. It could not, however, be stopped from devouring the palace, the house, and everything around it. However, to relieve the people, driven out homeless as they were, he threw open to them the Campus Martius and the public buildings of Agrippa, and even his own gardens, and raised temporary structures to receive the destitute multitude. Supplies of food were brought up from Ostia and the neighbouring towns, and the price of corn was reduced

to three sesterces a peck. These acts, though popular, produced no effect, since a rumour had gone forth everywhere that, at the very time when the city was in flames, the emperor appeared on a private stage and sang of the destruction of Troy, comparing present misfortunes with the calamities of antiquity.

At last, after five days, an end was put to the conflagration at the foot of the Esquiline hill, by the destruction of all buildings on a vast space, so that the violence of the fire was met by clear ground and an open sky. **But before people had laid aside their fears, the flames returned, with no less fury this second time, and especially in the spacious districts of the city**. Consequently, though there was less loss of life, **the temples of the gods, and the porticoes which were devoted to enjoyment, fell in a yet more widespread ruin**. And to this conflagration there attached the greater infamy because it broke out on the Aemilian property of Tigellinus, and it seemed that Nero was aiming at the glory of founding a new city and calling it by his name. Rome, indeed, is divided into fourteen districts, four of which remained uninjured, three were levelled to the ground, while in the other seven were left only a few shattered, half-burnt relics of houses.[147]

Tacitus furthermore records that Nero falsely accused the Christians of having started the fire:

> But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures **on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the**

> **populace**. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, **again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome**, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.[148]

According to Tacitus, some of the Christians had indeed confessed to the crime, resulting in the arrest and execution of many more:

> Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, **not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind**. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

The Fire of Rome was also reported on by other historians, although these accounts appear to be less informed and are more biased against Nero than that of Tacitus.

Suetonius:

> For under cover of displeasure at the ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow, crooked streets, he set fire to the city so openly that several ex-consuls did not venture to lay hands on his chamberlains although they caught them on their estates with tow and fire-brands, while some granaries near the Golden House, whose room he particularly desired, were demolished by engines of war and then set on fire, because their walls were of stone. For six days and seven nights destruction raged, while the people were driven for shelter to monuments and tombs. At that time, besides an immense number of dwellings, **the houses of leaders of old were burned**, still adorned with trophies of victory, **and the temples of the gods** vowed and dedicated by the kings and later in the Punic and Gallic wars, and whatever else interesting and noteworthy had survived from antiquity. **Viewing the conflagration from the tower of Maecenas** and exulting, as he said, in 'the beauty of the flames,' he sang the whole of the 'Sack of Ilium,' in his regular stage costume. Furthermore, to gain from this calamity too all the spoil and booty possible, while promising the removal of the debris and dead bodies free of cost he allowed no one to approach the ruins of his own property; and from the contributions which he not only received, but even demanded, he nearly bankrupted the provinces and exhausted the resources of individuals.[149]

Casius Dio:

> After this Nero set his heart on accomplishing what had doubtless always been his desire, namely to make an

end of the whole city and realm during his lifetime. At all events, he, like others before him, used to call Priam wonderfully fortunate in that he had seen his country and his throne destroyed together. **Accordingly he secretly sent out men who pretended to be drunk or engaged in other kinds of mischief, and caused them at first to set fire to one or two or even several buildings in different parts of the city**, so that people were at their wits' end, not being able to find any beginning of the trouble nor to put an end to it, though they constantly were aware of many strange sights and sounds. **For there was naught to be seen but many fires, as in a camp**, and naught to be heard from the talk of the people except such exclamations as 'This or that is afire,' 'Where?' 'How did it happen?' 'Who kindled it?' 'Help?' Extraordinary excitement laid hold on all the citizens in all parts of the city, and they ran about, some in one direction and some in another, as if distracted. Here men while assisting their neighbours would learn that their own premises were afire; there others, before 20 reached them that their own houses had caught fire, would be told that they were destroyed. Those who were inside their houses would run out into the narrow streets thinking that they could save them from the outside, while people in the streets would rush into the dwellings in the hope of accomplishing something inside. There was shouting and wailing without end, of children, women, men, and the aged all together, so that no one could see thing or understand what was said by reason of the smoke and the shouting; and for this reason some might be seen standing speechless, as if they were dumb. Meanwhile many who were carrying out their goods and many, too, who were stealing the property of others, kept running into one another and falling over their burdens.

It was not possible to go forward nor yet to stand still, but people pushed and were pushed in turn, upset others and were themselves upset. Many were suffocated, many were trampled underfoot; in a word, no evil that can possibly happen to people in such a crisis failed to befall to them. They could not even escape anywhere easily; and if anybody did save himself from the immediate danger, he would fall into another and perish.

Now this did not all take place on a single day, but it lasted for several days and nights alike. Many houses were destroyed for want of anyone to help save them, **and many others were set on fire by the same men who came to lend assistance; for the soldiers, including the night watch**, having an eye to plunder, instead of putting out fires, **kindled new ones**. While such scenes were occurring at various points, a wind caught up the flames and carried them indiscriminately against all the buildings that were left. Consequently no one concerned himself any longer about goods or houses, but all the survivors, standing where they thought they were safe, gazed upon what appeared to be a number of scattered islands on fire or many cities all burning at the same time. There was no longer any grieving over personal losses, but they lamented the public calamity, recalling how once before most of the city had been thus laid waste by the Gauls. While the whole population was in this state of mind and many, crazed by the disaster, were leaping into the very flames, **Nero ascended to the roof of the palace**, from which there was the best general view of the greater part of the conflagration, and assuming the lyre-player's garb, he sang the 'Capture of Troy,' as he styled the song himself, though to the enemies of the spectators it was the Capture of Rome.[150]

There are numerous indications in Tacitus's account that Nero may **not** have been behind the burning of Rome:

- Nero only returned to the city when the fire threatened his own property, but this is no indication whatsoever that he did so deliberately. As the king of that country, he most likely trusted that his subordinates were more than capable of handling the fire and only returned there when news reached him that it was in fact beyond control.
- If Nero had planned to burn Rome, he would secretly have ensured that none of his own property, specifically his palace, could have ever been endangered. Instead, he lost nearly everything he owned.
- It would seem that once he returned to the city, Nero had in fact succeeded in bringing the fire under control, which then mysteriously broke out once more with devastating effect.
- Nero blamed Christians for starting the fire. Why would he have chosen this group specifically, unless they had indeed been involved? It is easily understood that Rome in the form of the Roman Catholic Church would later have concealed or destroyed any documentary evidence that the followers of Christ were behind the Great Fire of Rome.
- As discussed in chapter 9 and alluded to by James and John's question to Christ whether or not they should burn the town of Samaria,[151] the burning of cities was the modus operandi of Christ and his followers. The houses of the city leaders and the rich and the temples of the gods were invariably the first targets of an attack on a city, and consequently Suetonius's statement to this effect is no surprise. Although Tacitus merely mentions 'menacing gangs,' who claimed to act under orders (from Nero, presumably), the tactics followed by whoever was behind the fire are plain and simple—to cast suspicion on Nero. It is very likely that some of those who started the fire were dressed in

Roman uniform, as confirmed by Casius Dio. The rumour that Nero had sung of the destruction of Troy was most likely started by the same group.
- If indeed executed by the Christians, the burning of Rome should count as one of the most successful terror attacks on an enemy ever, considering that the Jews were no match for the Romans. Every aspect of this attack would have been planned in detail, from the starting of the fires with incendiary materials like bitumen or pitch to the recruitment if not infiltration of staff from Nero's household through bribery.
- A question that needs to be addressed is why the Christians (Jews) would have taken such an enormous risk. If discovered, brutal retaliation by the Romans against the Jewish state would probably have followed. Nero, however, punished only the Christians, not the Jews. The most likely motive for the attack was the execution of Paul (Christ), which had happened a couple of years earlier. It would no doubt have required a long time to plan the attack, possibly several years. One of the first steps would have been the spreading of disinformation about Nero in Rome, rumours that he planned to burn the city for the political exploits, as recorded by Tacitus. When it finally happened, everyone would have believed Nero to have planned the destruction of Rome. With the arsonists strategically spread throughout the city, they would initially have started the fire away from Nero's properties so as to draw all fire fighters to that area. The rest of Rome would then systematically have been set alight, including the palace of Nero. He may indeed have been the ultimate target, but was somehow mistaken to be in the palace when the attack was launched, as inadvertently suggested by Dio.
- The leader of the attack on Rome would have been none other than Simon Peter, whose religious activities in Rome have been recorded in Christian tradition.

When the Jews rose against Rome at the instigation of Simon Peter (bar Gioras) and John the Beloved (of Gischala) a few years later, the Romans had a score to settle.

8

Jesus, John, and the Templar Knights

> After these follows the text, 'And James and John come to him,' and all that section. But 'naked man with naked man,' and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.
>
> —*The Secret Gospel of Mark*

> When will you be revealed to us and when shall we see you?
> When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children.
>
> —The Gospel of Thomas

Much has been speculated about the relationship between Jesus and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. John, who must have been a teenage boy when he met Christ, made no secret of Christ's affection for him. The physical closeness they shared, John even reclining on the bosom of his Lord,[1] must have made the rest of the group feel a bit uncomfortable at times and no doubt would have raised eyebrows today. Through the past few decades, if not already from his own time, it has been suggested that Christ and John must have had a homosexual relationship,[2] while other theories, mostly fictional, suggest that Christ had led a normal life as a married man with children.[3]

Given the physical appearance of Christ, however, there can be little doubt that he had been shunned and ridiculed by women all his life. As his reputation as a magician grew, he would certainly have impressed young boys, who initially would be his only means of sexual gratification. There can be no doubt that Christ was a

highly intelligent man, who, like most normal young boys, must have dreamt about the beautiful women he saw. The constant ridicule he had to suffer as a child and as a young man must have fostered an unfathomable hatred in him towards the upper classes of society and in particular towards attractive women. This hatred would have been fuelled even more by the fact that he had to turn to boys for gratification of his sexual needs, something he must have loathed doing in the beginning and possibly up to the point when Mary Magdalene became his lover. Christ blessed Mary Magdalene for 'not faltering at the sight of me,'[4] suggesting that other women in general avoided him because of his ugly physical appearance.

Apart from the suspicious relationship between John and Christ as attested to in the New Testament itself, there is sufficient evidence to be found that Christ had homosexual lovers, which included the young boys John and Lazarus.

8.1 The Seduction of John

The description of a disciple 'whom Jesus loved' is found only in John[5] and is usually assumed to refer to John, the author of the fourth Gospel. Curiously, though, the author of John, who is henceforth assumed to indeed be John the Apostle, refers to Lazarus, the brother of Mary Magdalene and Martha, as 'the one you love.'[6] As remarked by the NIV translators, this must have been an exceptionally close relationship. Just how close is suggested in the disputed *The Secret Gospel of Mark*.[7] In this document the early church leader, Clement, attempts to discredit claims by the Carpocratians that Christ and Lazarus, a young man whom he had just revived from the dead, had been seen naked together at night:

> And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God.…After these follows the text, 'And James and John come to him,' and all that section. But 'naked man with naked man,' and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.

Although many have attempted to defend this episode as being part of some initiation ritual, the statement referring to a naked man being with a naked man leaves no doubt as to what the accusation was about. One may speculate whether or not James and John had also joined this 'initiation ritual.' They would have been teenage boys at the time, and it would seem that Christ had introduced them to a new experience—sexual gratification by another person.

In *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, Lazarus is again referred to as the one whom Jesus loved, although both James and John joined Christ that night. It is possible that John replaced Lazarus at some point in time.

In a sequence of events which could be labelled 'The Seduction of John,' Christ managed to finally destroy any resistance John might have offered to his advances, as John describes towards the end of his life:

> O God Jesu,…You who have kept me also till this present hour pure for yourself and untouched by union with a woman; who, when I wished to marry in my youth, appeared to me and said 'John, I need you'; who prepared for me also an infirmity of the body; who on the third occasion when I wished to marry prevented me at once, and then at the third hour of the day said to me upon the sea, 'John, if you were not mine, I would have allowed you to marry'; who blinded me for two years, letting me be grieved and entreat you; who in the third year opened the eyes of my understanding and gave me back the eyes that are seen; who when I regained my sight disclosed to me the repugnance of even looking closely at a woman; who

> saved me from the illusion of the present and guided me into that life which endures forever; who rid me of the foul madness that is in the flesh; who snatched me from a bitter death and presented me only to you; who silenced the secret disease of my soul and cut off the open deed; who weakened and expelled the rebellious enemy within me; who made my love for you unsullied; who ruled my course to you unbroken; who gave me undoubting faith in you; who instructed my knowledge of you with purity; who inspired my soul to have no possession but you alone…[8]

From this excerpt it is clear that John used to be a young man (or rather, a boy) with normal desires and longings, but over time Christ had succeeded in turning him away from women and towards himself. According to Christian tradition, John lived until the times of Trajan (see section 4.3), who ruled from 98 to 117 CE.[9] If John had reached the age of ninety and lived until 98 CE, he would have been born around 8 CE, which would make him about thirteen years old at the time of the Crucifixion.

Probably the best evidence from the Bible itself is **Peter's denial of Christ**,[10] in itself again a very strange episode. Assuming that what the Gospels report in this respect is true, Peter was quite upset that Christ doubted his loyalty. Christ's words 'you will deny three times that you know me' more likely were something like 'one day you will reject me.' Peter was the disciple who attacked one of those who came to arrest Christ. Following his arrest, however, Peter was accused by a servant maid as being one of Christ's followers, which the brave and fearless man denied three times. Realizing that Christ's prediction had come true, he wept bitterly.

The most likely explanation for Peter's denial lies in yet another curious event immediately following the arrest of Christ. According to Mark, '**A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind**.'[11] This young man could have been John, who in the beginning may not have been aware of the plot. It is quite probable that Peter, the leader of the now shattered group, would have been instructed by Christ to look after the others who were not in on the conspiracy. When he saw John fleeing, he must have followed him for that reason, and it must have been then that John blurted out the true nature of his love for his master. It must have been John who was with Peter when he 'denied' Christ.

What was the denial like? Peter swore that he did not know Christ and burst into tears. This behaviour, if anything, indicates that Peter was shocked and sickened by what he had just learned, for he had not realised before what had been going on between the two men. He then must have understood Christ's prediction that he (Peter) would sometime in the future turn his back on him. The story of the cock crowing immediately after Peter had denied knowing Christ for a third time and Peter bursting into tears when he remembered Christ's prediction would have been invented in an attempt to disguise the true reason for Peter's denial.

Reading between the lines, more biblical evidence is to be found suggesting that Peter's denial followed his shocking discovery of Christ's affair with John. We learn of the miraculous fish catch early in the Gospels,[12] when the calling of first disciples took place. Then, quite surprisingly, John relates the very same event when the risen Christ appears to his disciples on the beach.[13] Peter reacted (in John's account) by jumping overboard when he realised it was Christ. Would this not have been the reaction of a man who did not know if he could face his former master again? John's placing of the miraculous fish catch here can only be a rationalization of the true reason why Peter jumped from the boat (in an attempt to get away from Christ). If John's description of Peter's 'reinstatement' is a true reflection of the atmosphere at that moment, Peter's resentment of John is almost tangible:

> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, **what about him**?'

Christ replied:

> If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.

It is to be noted that Christ here confirms his intention to 'return' within John's lifetime, i.e., within that generation.

James, John, Peter, and no doubt Judas as well formed part of Christ's trusted inner circle. *The Secret Gospel of Mark* suggests that both John and James went to see Christ at night. James was either aware of the relationship or, unthinkable as it may seem, actively participated. That this may be the case is hinted at by Peter's dislike of James:

> Before certain men came from James, he (Peter) used to eat with the gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate from the gentiles because…[14]

He apparently could not stand their company.

8.2 The Dance of the Lord

The descriptions of Christ and Paul each having a body that was deformed but well developed suggests that the disciples of Christ knew exactly what he looked like in the nude. Could it be that he actually revelled in his deformity? John records that Christ had removed his garments to wash the feet of the apostles.[15] Modern translations, e.g., the *New International Version* (NIV) *Bible*, tend to soften this image by stating that he had removed his outer garments, but the original text states that he had removed his garments before he girded himself with a towel. For example, in Webster's Bible we read:

> He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

In the Gnostic *The Gospel of Thomas*,[16] Christ is asked by his disciples, 'When will you be revealed to us and when shall we see you?' To which Christ replies, '**When you disrobe without being ashamed** and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children.' Christ also stated that 'you as children of the truth, are not to clothe yourselves with these garments that are only for a time. Rather, I say to you, you will be blessed **when you strip yourselves**.'[17] Although the latter statement at first glance appears to have a figurative meaning, it may mean precisely what the text states. It appears that Christ was completely at ease being nude.

Another hint that Christ was sexually active is given by the so-called 'transfiguration on the mountain' event.[18] Christ's face reportedly shone, and his clothing 'became as white as the light' (a euphemism for Christ's naked pale body?). Peter's remark that he would put up shelters for Christ, Moses, and Elijah possibly indicates that he (Peter) was a bit drunk ('He did not know what he was saying'). What really happened is alluded to in *The Acts of John*:

> Another time **he took me and James and Peter to the mountain** where he used to pray, and we saw on him a light such that a man, who uses mortal speech, cannot describe what it was like.…and we saw him at a distance praying. Then I, since he loved me, went quietly up to him, as if he could not see, and stood there **looking at his hinder parts, and I saw him not dressed in clothes at all, but stripped of those that we usually saw upon him**, and not like a man at all. And I saw that his feet were whiter than snow, so that the ground there was lit up by his feet; and that his head stretched up to Heaven, so that I was afraid and cried out; and he, turning about, **appeared as a small**

> **man**, and caught hold of my beard and pulled it and said to me, 'John, do not be faithless, but believing, and not inquisitive.' And I said to him, 'Why Lord, what have I done?' But I tell you, my brethren, that I suffered such pain for thirty days in the place where he **touched my beard**, that I said to him, 'Lord, if your **playful tug has caused such pain**, what would it be if you dealt me a blow?' And he said to me, 'Let it be your concern from now on not to tempt him that cannot be tempted.' But Peter and James were vexed as I spoke with the Lord, and beckoned me to come to them and leave the Lord alone. And I went, and they both said to me, '**Who was it who spoke with the Lord when he was on the mountain top?** For we heard them both speaking.' And when I considered his abundant grace and his unity within many faces and his unceasing wisdom that looks after us, I said, 'You shall learn this from him if you ask him.'…And again when we—that is, his disciples—were sleeping in one house at Gennesaret, I wrapped myself in my cloak and watched by myself to see what he was doing. And first I heard him say, 'John, go to sleep.' Then I pretended to sleep; **and I saw another like him coming down**, and I heard him also say to my Lord, 'Jesus, the men you have chosen still disbelieve you.' And my Lord said to him, 'You are right; for they are men.' I will tell you another glory, brethren; **sometimes when I meant to touch him I encountered a material, solid body**; but at other times again when I felt him, his substance was immaterial and incorporeal, and as if he did not exist at all.[19]

It is quite clear that in both instances John had snuck up on Christ, who must have had other company and, in the first episode, had already undressed. Christ was annoyed at John and yanked his beard when he saw him. The other person who spoke to Christ could have

been anyone, a man or a woman, or possibly more than one person. That it could have been Mary Magdalene is suggested by the following variant of the 'transfiguration on the mountain' story by an indignant Epiphanius, which he had obtained from a Gnostic group:

> They claim that he [Christ] reveals it to her [Mary] after taking her aside on the mountain, praying, producing a woman from his side, beginning to have sex with her, and then partaking of his emission, if you please, to show that 'Thus we must do, that we may live.'[20]

Mary was alarmed and fell to the ground, in much the same manner as she had been shocked by Christ's intentions towards nonbelievers in the *Pistis Sophia*:

> Mary smote her breast, she cried out and wept,…and said, 'Woe unto sinners, for their chastisements are exceedingly enormous!'[21]

If such an event had ever occurred, Christ could never have produced a woman from his side by magic, and she would have been a flesh-and-blood woman with whom Christ had sexual intercourse in the presence of Mary Magdalene. More about unfortunate women like this one follows in chapter 10.

Finally, it seems that the transfiguration event ended with Christ performing some kind of dance for his disciples, according to *The Acts of John*:

> **After the Lord had so danced with us**, my beloved, he went out. And we were like men amazed or fast asleep, and we fled this way and that. And I saw him suffer, and did not wait by his suffering, but fled to the Mount of Olives and wept at what had come to pass.

It is not clear when, where, or just how Christ had danced for or with his disciples, but it is again referred to later in the text when Christ speaks to his disciples:

> Therefore ignore the many and despise those who are outside the mystery; for you must know that I am wholly with the Father, and the Father with me. **So then I have suffered none of those things which they will say of me; even the suffering I showed to you and the rest in my dance, I will that it be called a mystery.** For what you are, that I have shown you, as you see; **but what I am is known to me alone, and no one else. Let me have what is mine**; what is yours you must see through me; but me you must see truly—not that which I am, as I said, but that which you, as my kinsmen, are able to know.…When he said these things to me, and others which I know not how to say as he wills, he was taken up, without any of the multitude seeing him. And going down I laughed at them all, since he had told me what they said about him; and I held this one thing fast in my mind, **that the Lord had performed everything as a symbol and dispensation for the conversion and salvation of man**.

Just what this 'dance' and the 'mysteries' involved, we can only guess (did he dance in the nude?), but it is clear that Christ did not want it to become public knowledge. In *The Gospel of Thomas*, Christ asks his disciples what they think of him:

> Jesus says to his disciples: 'Compare me, and tell me who I am like.' Simon Peter says…Matthew says…Thomas says…Jesus says: 'I am no longer thy master; for thou hast drunk, thou art inebriated from the bubbling spring which is mine and which I sent forth.' Then he took him aside; he said three words to him; and when Thomas came back to his companions, they asked him: '**What did Jesus say to thee**?' And Thomas answered them: '**If I tell you [a single] one of the words he said to me, you will take up stones and throw them at me**, and fire will come out of the stones and consume you.'

This passage hints at something sinister about Christ and furthermore suggests that rumours had already been around at that time as acknowledged by Christ in his own words. These rumours may have been what Clement alluded to in *The Secret Gospel of Mark*.

Incidentally, we read of the following encounter in *The Acts of Thomas*:

> He [Thomas] saw lying there the body of a comely youth, and said: 'Lord, was it for this that you brought me out here, that I might see this temptation?'[22]

One cannot help but wonder!

8.3 Epiphanius's Heretics

For a man who supposedly led a saintly life, surprisingly many unsavoury rumours about the life of Christ were recorded in documents of the so-called heretics. Epiphanius was very apologetic for even mentioning some of these allegations against 'Christian' sects:

> I would not dare to utter the whole of this if I were not somehow compelled to from the excess of the feeling of grief within me over the futile things they do…I am afraid that I may be revealing the whole of this potent poison, like the face of some serpent's basilisk, to the harm of the readers rather than their correction. Truly it pollutes the ears, the blasphemous assembly of great audacity, the

> gathering and the interpretation of this dirt, the mucky perversity of the scummy obscenity.…In any case, neither will I be able to pass them by; I am forced to speak out.[23]

What were these horrendous 'things' he was so reluctant to relate to his readers?

Of the Stratiotics and Gnostics:

> And once they recognize each other from this they start feasting right away—and they set the table with lavish provisions for eating meat and drinking wine if they are poor. But then, after a drinking bout…they get hot for each other next. And the husband will move away from his wife and tell her 'Get up, perform Agape with the brother.' And when the wretched couple has made love…to lift their blasphemy up to heaven, the woman and man receive the man's emission on their own hands. And they stand with their eyes raised heavenward but the filth on their hands and pray…and offer that stuff on their hands to the true Father of all, and say, '**We offer thee this gift, the body of Christ**.' And then they eat it partaking of their own dirt, and say '**This is the body of Christ; and this is the Pascha, because of which our bodies suffer and are compelled to acknowledge the passion of Christ**.
>
> And so with the woman's emission when she happens to be having her period.…And 'This,' they say, '**is the blood of Christ**.'…But although they have sex with each other they renounce procreation. It is for enjoyment, not reproduction, that they eagerly pursue the seduction.… They come to climax but absorb the seeds of their dirt, not by implanting them for procreation, but by eating the dirty stuff themselves.[24]

Epiphanius proceeds to tell how they aborted the foetus of a woman who happened to become pregnant, which they then cut up and each ate a part of—their idea of a 'perfect Passover.' However depraved these Christians were, it was unlikely that this claim was based on the truth.

In Epiphanius's view, the Gnostics deliberately misinterpreted texts from the Gospels and the Old Testament to suit their own practices, claiming for instance that rather than allowing the emission of a man reaching climax to fall to the ground, they would eat it.[25]

Of the Phibionites:

> Offer their shameful sacrifices of fornication…in 365 names which they have invented themselves as names of supposed archons, making fools of their female partners and saying, '**Have sex with me**, so that I may offer you to the archon.'…And until he mounts, or rather, sinks, **through 365 falls of copulation**, he starts back down through the same acts…Now when he reaches a mass as great as that of a total number of 730 falls—I mean the falls of unnatural unions…then finally a man of this sort has the hardihood to say, '**I am Christ, for I have descended from on high through the names of 365 archons**!'[26]

Of the Carpocratians:

> Carpocrates…his character is the worst of all.…And he says that Jesus our Lord was begotten of Joseph, just as all men were generated from a man's seed and a woman.…Hence these victims of this fraud's deception have become so extremely arrogant **that they consider themselves superior even to Jesus**.…The plain fact is that these people perform every unspeakable, unlawful thing, which is not right even to say, **and every kind of homosexual union and**

> **carnal intercourse with women**, with every member of the body, and they perform magic, sorcery, and idolatry and say that this is the discharge of their obligations in the body…[27]

All of these groups associated themselves closely with Christ, and one must ask how it was at all possible for these heresies to have developed if Christ had indeed been a pure and saintly figure. The answer is simply that he was actually known as Simon Magus, who had been accused of these practices.[28] It is no surprise, then, that **the Gnostics claimed that Christ himself had revealed these obscenities to them**.[29]

Perhaps the best description of the practices of the early followers of Christ is given by Minucius Felix, a Christian apologist who flourished sometime between 160 and 300 CE.[30] In his work called *Octavius*, he presents the accusations brought against the Christians through the voice of an attacker of the Christian faith:

> And now, as wickeder things advance more fruitfully and abandoned manners creep on day by day, those abominable shrines of an impious assembly are maturing themselves throughout the whole world. Assuredly this confederacy ought to be rooted out and execrated. **They know one another by secret marks and insignia, and they love one another almost before they know one another. Everywhere also there is mingled among them a certain religion of lust**, and they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters, that even a not unusual debauchery may by the intervention of that sacred name become incestuous: **it is thus that their vain and senseless superstition glories in crimes.** Nor, concerning these things, would intelligent report speak of things so great and various, and requiring to be prefaced by an apology,

> unless truth were at the bottom of it. **I hear that they adore the head of an ass**, that basest of creatures, consecrated by I know not what silly persuasion—a worthy and appropriate religion for such manners. **Some say that they worship the virilia of their pontiff and priest**, and adore the nature, as it were, of their common parent. I know not whether these things are false; certainly suspicion is applicable to secret and nocturnal rites; and he who explains their ceremonies **by reference to a man punished by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross**, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve.
>
> …**And of their banqueting it is well known all men speak of it everywhere; even the speech of our Cirtensian testifies to it**. On a solemn day they assemble at the feast, with all their children, sisters, mothers, people of every sex and of every age. **There, after much feasting, when the fellowship has grown warm, and the fervour of incestuous lust has grown hot with drunkenness**, a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked, by throwing a small piece of offal beyond the length of a line by which he is bound, to rush and spring; and thus the conscious light being overturned and extinguished in the shameless darkness, **the connections of abominable lust involve them in the uncertainty of fate**. Although not all in fact, yet in consciousness all are alike incestuous, since by the desire of all of them everything is sought for which can happen in the act of each individual.[31]

It is inconceivable that all of these accusations and strange stories about the sexuality of Christ could only be inventions by enemies of

the Christian faith. It would rather seem that the original Christians were only following the example of their sex-crazed master.

8.4 The Demise of the Templar Knights

Probably the strongest evidence in support of the hypothesis that Christ had had a homosexual relationship with John is to be found in the demise of the well-known order of the Knights Templar, also known as The Poor Knights of Christ and the Knights of the Temple of Solomon.[32] This was a religious military order established at the time of the Crusades. They originally operated only in the Holy Land but soon became a powerful, influential, and very wealthy organization that reported only to the Pope. They owned properties scattered throughout Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Holy Land.[33]

The Order was effectively destroyed on October 13, 1307, when King Phillip IV the Fair of France had every Templar in France arrested and had all Templar property in France sequestered. What brought them to their knees was a series of charges brought against the Order, charges relating to so-called irreligious practices and blasphemies committed by the Templars. The most serious accusations were related to the initiation ceremony of new members.[34] **New members were required to deny Christ three times, to spit on the cross three times (some were instructed to trample or urinate on the cross), and most notably, the newly induced knight was instructed to undress completely and was kissed three times by his initiator on the base of his spine (the anus), his penis, his navel, and his mouth**. Many of the initiates were informed that Christ was a false prophet. They were not to tell about the initiation rites on pain of death or imprisonment.

Some scholars have suggested that the accusations brought against the Templars were fabricated by the enemies of the order, as claimed by Peter of Bologna, Procurator of the Order at the Roman Court.[35] There would simply be no reason for an order of perfectly sane knights to conduct such rituals. However, if they had discovered evidence revealing Christ's homosexual affair with John, it would

make perfect sense. In fact, a Templar priest named John Stroke testified to the Inquisition that Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the Templars, had told him to 'deny Christ, but believe in the great omnipotent God, who created heaven and earth, and not to believe in the Crucifixion.'[36] Why would they have done so? How they may have come across new information about Christ is suggested in one of the numerous books about the Knights Templar:

> The Copper Scroll found among the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran lists the scrolls and Temple treasures that were buried beneath the Jerusalem Temple in, or immediately prior to, 68 CE. It is known that the nine Crusader founders of the Order of the Knights Templar continuously excavated under the ruins of that Temple between 1118 and 1128 CE.…The older rituals of Freemasonry state that these knights found documentation under the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem and brought them to the St Clair estates in Kilwinning, Scotland, in 1140 CE.[37]

The most likely conclusion is that **the Templar Knights had found Peter's notes as referred to in *The Secret Gospel of Mark***, or at least copies of these notes, causing them to reject Christ as their Saviour and introduce initiation rituals to reflect their abhorrence of him. The denial of Christ three times, exactly as Peter did, and the simulated homosexual act could not have had any other origin than that Peter (or someone else) had written about Christ's homosexuality, recounting Peter's disgust when he discovered the fact. As the Knights answered only to the Pope, it may very well be that the Pope had been informed about the existence of Peter's notes and their contents. When they were arrested and brought to trial, he would have had no choice but to have remained silent and supported their conviction. For all we know, these documents are still safely locked away in the secret vaults of the Vatican.

Baphomet, the Head with Three Faces

One of the accusations brought against the Templar Knights was that they worshipped an idol named Baphomet, which had the form of a severed head or a head with three faces.[38] Some knights claimed that the head had a reddish colour and a 'fierce-looking' face, while others claimed that it had two faces.[39] This bearded head was also referred to as their 'saviour.'[40]

Pinkham argues that the most likely owner of the head, which was described as 'terrible…the face of a demon,' was John the Baptist,[41] while Laidler argues instead that this human head was most likely the Holy Grail of Christian tradition and in fact the very head of Jesus Christ.[42] He bases his conclusion on a narrative in the *Continuation* of the Old French *Perceval*, in which Nicodemus happens to have in his possession a head of Christ, from 'the day he had seen him on the cross.' He points out that the medieval author of the document would have risked torture and death by claiming that the head was that of the crucified Lord and instead wrote a tale about *a* head of Jesus Christ and not *the* head of Christ.

This claim would not make sense in terms of a Messiah having departed into heaven—but indeed if Paul and Jesus Christ were one and the same person. It is certainly possible that his severed head may have been retrieved directly from the place of execution, or that it had been preserved by the Romans and later somehow ended up in Jewish hands.

The most common interpretation of the name appears to be that it was an Old French corruption of the name of Muhammad,[43] although several other solutions have been suggested. These include an interpretation from Greek as *baphe metous*, meaning 'Baptism of wisdom'[44] and from the Arabic words *Abufihamat*, meaning 'The father of understanding.'[45]

The most probable interpretation is, however, to be found in the phonetic Hebrew equivalent of the word, which is *ba'ah*,[46] meaning 'gush over, swell, desire'; *pum*,[47] meaning 'the mouth'; and *'eth*,[48]

meaning 'self,' rendering '(He who) desired the mouth for himself.' This interpretation would suggest a homosexual act of oral sex.

As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, those faces were the 'faces' of Simon Magus, Jesus Christ, and Paul, the three identities of Jesus Christ. There is simply no other realistic explanation why a head could have been believed to have three faces. Although it is highly improbable that a thousand-year-old severed head would have retained its original skin tone and colour, the reddish colour and 'fierce-looking' face match similar physical descriptions of Christ (see section 6.1). Had it been the actual head of Christ, Christ's followers may have embalmed and restored it to its original appearance.

8.5 Was Jesus Gay?

Apart from the evidence presented above, the aerial battle in which Judas sodomises Christ (see section 6.4) clearly associates Christ with homosexuality. Why else would such a tale have been invented? An obscure story from the *Toledot Yeshu*[49] relates how Simon Magus had fashioned himself a boy from air, which he kept 'where his bed is,' to assist him in his performances. This story was most likely contrived when Christ as Simon Magus was questioned about having a boy in his bedroom sometime during the beginning of his career.

For the reasons outlined above, there can be no doubt that Christ had practised homosexuality until the time when Mary Magdalene became his mistress.

9

The Violent Messiah

> That Christ Himself was put to flight by the Jews, and having collected a band of nine hundred men, committed robberies.
>
> —Hierocles

> This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.
>
> —Matthew 24:34

The canonical scriptures present Jesus Christ as a peace-loving man who taught his followers to love both each other and their enemies. Whereas this certainly must have been the message he conveyed during the early stages of his ministry, there are some remarks in the canonical scriptures and also events recorded in numerous apocryphal accounts and historic documents that raise the eyebrows. These events include Christ's violent storming of the temple, Simon Peter's attack on one of the soldiers who came to arrest his Master (why was he carrying a concealed weapon?) and James and John's request to summarily burn Samaria with the fire from heaven:

> Lord, do you want us to **call down fire from heaven** to burn them up?[1]

Perhaps most disturbing of all in terms of the modern interpretation of Christianity is Christ's promise to return in vengeance during that same generation.[2] His promise of judgment and eternal damnation of nonbelievers upon his return is well documented throughout the

New Testament. How does this accord with his promise to return still within that generation? Was Christ intent on overthrowing Judaism? The Ebionites claimed that Christ had promised to do just that:

> I have come to do away with sacrifices, and if you do not stop sacrificing, the wrath will not stop from among you.[3]

And then, one of the greatest enigmas, Christ's promise of violence to follow:

> Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. **I did not come to bring peace, but the sword**. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.[4]
>
> **I have come to bring fire on the earth**, and how I wish it were already kindled!…Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.[5]
>
> If you do not have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. And it is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors' [the wicked]; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me.[6]
>
> I have brought nothing into the world when I came, **save this fire**, this water, this wine and this blood.…**And the fire**, the water and the wine are for the purification of all the sins of the world.[7]

These words clearly did not refer to the end of time, when Christ would come again, but to that specific generation onwards.

The canonical scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Jews had rejected Christ as their king. Hierocles records that Christ had turned to robbery after he had been rejected by the Jews:

> But he affirmed that Christ Himself was put to flight by the Jews, and having collected a band of nine hundred men, committed robberies.[8]

Why would he have invented this false accusation? Like Hierocles, other writers of that time also wrote about the true actions of the Lord:

> Marcion of Pontus…He advanced the most daring blasphemy against Him who is proclaimed as God by the law and the prophets, **declaring Him to be the author of evils, to take delight in war**, to be infirm of purpose, and even to be contrary to Himself.[9]

Even though it would appear that authors from as early as Suetonius have suggested that Christ was crucified because he was either a rebel or the instigator of an uprising,[10] I had never really given this possibility much thought until I happened to read a remark by Furneaux in his book, *The Other Side of the Story*. In his opinion, the wealthy but cheating Ananias and Saphira falling dead ('struck dead by the Lord') before Simon Peter[11] actually meant that Peter had murdered them.[12] I remembered reading somewhere in Josephus's works about a man called Simon who plundered the homes of the rich and 'tormented' their bodies. It did not take long to find. The name of that individual was Simon bar Gioras.[13] Could it be that Josephus and the Jews at large knew Simon Peter as Simon bar Gioras?

9.1 Simon Peter (Simon bar Gioras)

An intensive investigation revealed the following similarities between the two characters:

- Simon Peter was also called Simon bar Jonah by Christ.[14] Could this name be linked to Simon bar Gioras? It indeed appears to be the case:

Simon Peter
= Simon bar Jonah
= Simon bar Yonah[khir] (Hebrew)
= Simon bar Joachim (English)
= Simon bar Gioacchino (Latin, Italian)
= Simon bar Gioa[cchino]
= Simon bar Giora/Gioras/Goia

In other words, for some reason the father of Simon Peter was known by only the first part of his full name. The name Simon bar Gioras is also recorded as Simon bar Giora[15] and Simon bar Goia.[16] The latter form suggests that the *r* was originally absent from the name. It is possible that **Gioa** became **Giora** because of the Hebrew pronunciation of the Roman name. Josephus may simply have remembered the name incorrectly.

- Incidentally, throughout the early Christian texts, claim is made that the names of the parents of Mary were Joachim and Anna, which was not the truth. Some Christian traditions relate that the mother of Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was called Joanna,[17] which suggests that Yonakhir (Joachim) and (Jo)Anna were falsely introduced as the parents of Mary, to distance Mary from her true origins.
- Simon bar Giora was the leader of the *sicarii*, who hid their daggers underneath their cloaks. Simon Peter drew his short sword (a dagger) during Christ's arrest.[18]
- During the reign of Agrippa II, Albinus, the procurator of Judea, conducted a widespread campaign to eliminate the *sicarii* and managed to capture and kill many of them.[19] The *sicarii* reacted by kidnapping the son and other servants of the high priest Ananias (Ananus, the son of Ananus), who was then forced to negotiate with Albinus the release of these victims in exchange for captured *sicarii*. It was this Ananias who orchestrated the execution of James, the brother of Christ.

While Simon Peter was in Rome, the four concubines of Agrippa and Xanthippe, the beautiful wife of Albinus, 'came to Peter,' causing Agrippa and Albinus to rage and swear to kill Peter.[20] Would these wives willingly have left the luxury and wealth of their homes to join a complete stranger? Even though the text implies that Peter had merely 'withdrawn' them from their husbands, they may actually have been kidnapped, either as bargaining chips or simply as an act of revenge on Agrippa and Albinus. Simon Peter is, therefore, linked to an act of aggression against Agrippa and Albinus, who were the mortal enemies of Simon bar Gioras.

- It may be relevant that Simon Peter was supposedly arrested and imprisoned by Agrippa I, but he managed to escape when an angel opened his cell door.[21] Josephus tells us of a man called Simon arrested by this same Agrippa:

> There was a certain man of the Jewish nation at Jerusalem, **who appeared to be very accurate in the knowledge of the law. His name was Simon. This man got together an assembly, while the king was absent in Caesarea, and had the insolence to accuse him of unholy living, and said that he might be justly excluded out of the temple, since it only belonged to native Jews**. But the general of Agrippa's army informed him that **Simon had made such a speech to the people. So the king sent for him**; and as he was sitting in the theatre, he directed him to sit down by him, and said to him with a low and gentle voice, 'What is there done in this place that is contrary to the law?' But he had nothing to say for himself, **but begged his pardon**. So the king was more easily reconciled to him than one could have imagined.…So he (the king) made Simon a small present, and dismissed him.[22]

In the *Toledot Yeshu*, we find another Simon known for his knowledge of the law:

> The Sages desired to separate from Israel those who continued to claim Yeshu as the Messiah, **and they called upon a greatly learned man**, Simeon Kepha, for help. Simeon went to Antioch, main city of the Nazarenes and proclaimed to them: 'I am the disciple of Yeshu. He has sent me to show you the way. I will give you a sign as Yeshu has done.'[23]

In this instance the learned man is clearly identified with Simon Peter.

Finally, we read in *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews* the following account of Simon bar Gioras:

> There was also another cut-throat ruffian **of a noble house of Judea and Jerusalem** [i.e., that of Simon Tassi] about the same time, called Schimeon, who began also Jehochanan's manners in slaying innocents, and robbing and raving in Jerusalem. **For Anani the High Priest had once appointed him Prince and Captain of Jerusalem, and afterwards finding him an enemy banished him from the city**. Wherefore Schimeon went and got him a rout of unthrifts, murderers and thieves,…[24]

As a note to this text, the authenticity of *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews* may be disputed, but it nevertheless contains some information that appears to be genuine and that may have been derived from earlier sources. The Schimeon who began 'robbing and raving' in Jerusalem is Simon bar Gioras, who swore revenge against Anani (Ananias).

Returning to this Simon, just how many public figures of that name were active at that time? The priest Anani could have been either Ananias ben Nebedeus[25] (47–59 CE[26]) or Ananus ben Ananus, who served as high priest in 62 CE.[27] Simon Peter's first arrest was made by Agrippa, who died in 44 CE, some years before Ananias was appointed high priest of Israel. It is perfectly possible, however, that this Simon, who had become a spokesman of the people during the reign of Agrippa, was later appointed to a senior position by Ananias. For some reason, however, Simon fell from grace and was banished from the city. Regarding the biblical account, there is of course no such thing as an angel, and whoever wrote the Acts of the Apostles or his Christian sources most likely preferred to portray Simon Peter as a hero, not the coward Josephus reports him to be (having begged the king's pardon). It should be noted that Josephus refers to a Simon ben Gamaliel as 'of a very noble family of the sect of the Pharisees, which are supposed to excel others in the accurate knowledge of the laws of their country. He was a man of great wisdom and reason and capable of restoring public affairs by his prudence, when they were in an ill posture.'[28] If this is the man Agrippa had sent for, it is probably not possible to link Simon Peter's arrest to the arrest by Agrippa of any other Simon in Josephus's works.

It is perhaps more than mere coincidence that Simon Peter was involved in the death (murder) of a wealthy man called Ananias and his wife. They must have been high-profile members of society for their names to be mentioned in Christian literature. Had this Ananias been one of the high priests described above, his murder would have reverberated through the Jewish community. Ananias ben Nebdeus was murdered by Manahem, the son of Judas the Galilean.[29] In section 3.4 it was shown that Judas the Galilean was named as one of the disciples of Christ (see table 3.1). If he was not the same person

as either Thaddeus or Simon the Zealot, he was at least closely associated with Christ and therefore with Simon Peter. Ananus ben Ananus was murdered by the Idumeans.[30] Simon Peter as Simon bar Gioras had a score to settle with this high priest and abducted his son and servants to negotiate the release of his *sicarii*. It is possible that he requested publicly that Ananus should be murdered, or it may simply have been known publicly that Ananus was one of Simon's greatest enemies. Even though he may not have murdered him personally, the death of Ananus (Ananias) may for these reasons have been attributed to Simon Peter.

- Herod Agrippa was struck down by an angel of the Lord shortly after Simon Peter's release (escape) from prison.[31] Josephus states that Agrippa died of sudden violent stomach pains,[32] most certainly the result of poisoning. The biblical account of Agrippa's involvement with Peter and his subsequent death leads one to suspect that the murder may have been an act of revenge by Peter.
- During Christ's trial the Roman soldiers put a purple robe on him but later removed it.[33] Simon bar Gioras was also known by the Roman name **Simon bar Poras**,[34] the latter word certainly being a shortened version of the Latin word *purpura*[35] (*porpora*[36] in Italian) for the colour purple and most likely a wordplay on bar Gioras. Simon was, therefore, most likely known to the Romans as Simon, son of the Purple One (Christ). When Simon bar Gioras was arrested, he put on his purple cloak before surrendering, probably as a declaration that he was the one they wanted most.[37] Mary may have fashioned a robe for her son from the fabric taken from the temple curtain, and this became Simon Peter's after the Crucifixion.
- As stated, Simon Peter mostly likely murdered the wealthy couple Ananias and Sapphira. Simon bar Gioras 'harassed (plundered) the rich men's houses and tormented their bodies' (Josephus). According to *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews*, Simon bar Gioras 'sacked the houses…and spoiled their goods, which was very much.'[38]

- In the Acts of the Apostles, Simon Peter publicly addresses a crowd, 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem…Men of Israel, listen to this….'[39] At that occasion three thousand followed Peter. In *The Wonderful and Most Deplorable History of the Latter Times of the Jews*, a similar public address by Simon bar Gioras is described:

> Wherefore Schimeon went and got him a rout of unthrifts, murderers, and thieves, casting in his mind, and saying, except I join myself with such good fellows, **I shall never be able to be revenged of Anani and his assistants**, that have thus banished me out of Jerusalem into exile wrongfully, and unto my great dishonour. Shall I who have been in such estate, now be cast out of my dignity, and be constrained to wander here and there as a banished man? **He went therefore through all the cities of Judea and Galilee, causing to be proclaimed in the streets and market places, and sent his letters where he could not come himself, in this manner and form**: '**Whoso listeth** to be rid from the bondage of his master, or hath had any injury in his country, or what servants soever desire to be set at liberty, or whoso cannot abide the rule of his father or master: all that be in debt, and stand in fear of your creditors, or fear the Jews for shedding innocent blood, and therefore lurketh solitary in woods or mountains; if there be any man that is accused of any notorious crime, and in any danger therefore; to be short, **whosoever is disposed to rob and to do injury and wrong**, **to haunt whores**, **to steal, to**

> **murder**; to eat and drink at other men's cost, without labor of his hands, **let him resort to me**, I will deliver him from the yoke and danger of the laws, and will find him his fill of **booties and spoils**.' There are assembled unto him about twenty thousand men, all murderers, thieves, rebels, lawless persons, wicked and seditious men…[40]

Both Simon Peter and Simon bar Gioras were therefore leaders who publicly addressed the Jews in similar fashion and gathered a following. The 'haunting of whores' and the 'booties and spoils' are discussed in section 9.4.

- Peter, the name Christ gave to Simon, is generally assumed to mean 'rock,' from the Hebrew *kêph*,[41] *Kephas*[42] (Cephas, from its Hebrew equivalent), and *petra*[43] (rock) in Greek. Christ promised that he would be the foundation of Christ's new religion:

> And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven…[44]

In Christian tradition Saint Peter appears to have become known as the gatekeeper, from Christ's promise that he would hold the keys to heaven. It should be noted that the Hebrew word *çâphaph*[45] literally means 'to snatch away, i.e., terminate' but also 'to be a doorkeeper.' Christ stated that Peter would also be called Cephas,[46] which is phonetically similar to *çâphaph* and may imply that Christ actually meant that Simon Peter would be 'the doorkeeper.' As has been pointed out before, Christ had every intention of returning to Israel within the next couple of decades following his crucifixion, so the appellation 'doorkeeper' must be interpreted in the context of this setting. As the one with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, he would have been

heaven's doorkeeper; this was perhaps the origin of the nickname Cephas.

In section 9.4 it is shown that Christ and his disciples conducted a terror campaign against cities and villages not prepared to join them in their fight against the Romans. Christ hated the religious establishment in Israel and used this terror campaign to overthrow the religious and political leaders of the cities and villages under siege, and he also destroyed their religious buildings. Josephus describes Simon bar Gioras as 'the tyrant that lay before the gates,' who prevented the inhabitants of Jerusalem from fleeing and deserting to the Romans.[47] It would seem that Simon Peter's role in an attack on a city was to secure and control the city gates in a preemptive strike so that the rest of the fighters could easily move into the city. The 'heaven' to which Simon Peter held the keys lay beyond these gates, inside the city walls.

- Simon bar Gioras was imprisoned in the Mamertine Prison before being executed by strangulation.[48] Christian tradition relates that Simon Peter was imprisoned in the Mamertine Prison before his martyrdom,[49] and that he was crucified upside down, as supposedly predicted by Christ:

> But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.[50]

In the next verse, it is stated that Christ by these words predicted the kind of death Peter would suffer. There is, however, no other evidence to support the notion that he was crucified. The common factor is, however, that both Simons were executed in Rome. According to Eusebius, Simon Peter was executed under Nero,[51] who died in 68 CE. If this is correct, it would dismiss the possibility that Simon Peter and Simon bar Gioras could be

one and the same person. However, it is very likely that no exact Christian records existed about the death of Simon Peter, specifically if he was indeed Simon bar Gioras. Nero was succeeded by the less-known Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, each of whom ruled only for a couple of months.[52] Vespasian formally became emperor in December of 69 CE and ruled until 79 CE.[53] Simon bar Gioras and, therefore, Simon Peter would have been executed during his reign. As the fall of Jerusalem occurred in 70 CE, only two years after Nero's reign, it is possible if not likely that Eusebius (ca. 260–339 CE)[53] attributed his death to Nero, the well-known early persecutor of Christians.[54]

9.2 John the Beloved (John of Gischala)

Along with Simon Peter, the two people closest to Christ were John and James, the sons of Zebedee. If Simon Peter had turned to violence as argued above, would Christ's other disciples, at least those close to him, not have done the same? There indeed was a John who was, in fact, a bitter opponent of Simon bar Gioras. The name of this John was John of Gischala (Giscala), son of Levi.[55] Before dealing with John of Gischala, we will take a closer look at the lineage of John the Beloved.

The Zebedee brothers were also named by Christ as the sons of Boanerges, supposedly meaning 'sons of thunder.'[56] Little public attention (meaning not hidden in obscure academic publications) appears to have been given to the possible meaning of the name Zebedee, with not much attention devoted to the name Boanerges either. Most efforts regarding the latter were focused on deriving the interpretation of *boanerges* as given by Mark. Alternative interpretations can be derived with relative ease directly from Hebrew, although these interpretations do not match the image of Christianity.

As discussed in section 3.4, Zebedee can be interpreted as *Zeabediy*, meaning **The Wolf**, from the Hebrew *zᵉ'êb*, pronounced *zeh-abe* and meaning 'wolf,' and *diy*, pronounced *dee* and meaning 'the, that.' As argued earlier, Zebedee would have been a nickname given to

Matthew, the disciple of Christ. Boanerges appears to have a related meaning from the Greek *boao*, meaning 'to halloo or excite a pack of hunting dogs,' while *nerges* can be translated from the Sumerian words *ner*, meaning 'lord,' and *ges*, *gis*, meaning 'penis.' *Boao-nerges* can therefore be interpreted to mean something like '**Hallooer of the Lord of the Penis**.' If Christ did indeed have a homosexual relationship with John, as argued in section 8.1, it would perfectly match John as belonging to the Lord of the Penis.

Christ would never have given himself such a name in Hebrew, but with probably few people being able to understand Sumerian, he may have called himself 'Lord of the Penis.' It seems that he jokingly gave the alternative interpretation to his disciples, without them ever knowing its true meaning. The reason why John and James would have been given the name Boanerges appears to be that they were responsible for 'psyching up' Christ's hordes before an attack. It would have been Simon Peter's duty to secure the city gates with a surprise attack, which would then be followed by the horde charging into the city with blood-curdling war cries.

John and the Town of Gischala

Josephus identifies Gischala as the hometown of John, the son of Levi, and makes no secret of his contempt of John:

> Now as Josephus was thus engaged in the administration of the affairs of **Galilee, there arose a treacherous person, a man of Gischala, the son of Levi, whose name was John**. His character was that of a very cunning and very knavish person, beyond the ordinary rate of the other men of eminence there, **and for wicked practices he had not his fellow anywhere**. **Poor he was at first**, and for a long time his wants were a hindrance to him in his wicked designs. He was a ready liar, and yet very sharp in gaining credit to his fictions: he thought it a point of

virtue to delude people, and would delude even such as were the dearest to him. He was a hypocritical pretender to humanity, but where he had hopes of gain, **he spared not the shedding of blood**: his desires were ever carried to great things, and he encouraged his hopes from those mean wicked tricks which he was the author of. **He had a peculiar knack at thieving; but in some time he got certain companions in his impudent practices; at first they were but few, but as he proceeded on in his evil course, they became still more and more numerous.** He took care that none of his partners should be easily caught in their rogueries, but chose such out of the rest as had the strongest constitutions of body, and the greatest courage of soul, together with great skill in martial affairs; **as he got together a band of four hundred men, who came principally out of the country of Tyre, and were vagabonds that had run away from its villages**; **and by the means of these he laid waste all Galilee**, and irritated a considerable number, who were in great expectation of a war then suddenly to arise among them…,[57]

Now no place of Galilee remained to be taken [by the Romans] but the small city of Gischala, whose multitude yet were desirous of peace; for they were generally husbandmen, and always applied themselves to cultivate the fruits of the earth. However, **there were a great number that belonged to a band of robbers, that were already corrupted, and had crept in among them, and some of the governing part of the citizens were sick of the same distemper. It was John, the son of a certain man whose name was Levi, that drew them into this rebellion, and encouraged them in it.** He was a cunning knave, and of a temper that could put on various shapes; very rash in expecting great things, and very sagacious in bringing

> about what he hoped for. It was known to everybody that he was fond of war, in order to thrust himself into authority; **and the seditious part of the people of Gischala were under his management.**[58]

and

> But as for Gischala, its affairs were thus: When John, the son of Levi, saw some of the citizens much elevated upon their revolt from the Romans, he labored to restrain them, and entreated them that they would keep their allegiance to them. But he could not gain his purpose, although he did his endeavors to the utmost; for the neighboring people of Gadara, Gabara, and Sogana, **with the Tyrians, got together a great army, and fell upon Gischala, and took Gischala by force, and set it on fire; and when they had entirely demolished it, they returned home.** Upon which John was so enraged, that he armed all his men, and joined battle with the people forementioned; and rebuilt Gischala after a manner better than before, and fortified it with walls for its future security.[59]

The town of Gischala is generally identified as Jish[60] (Arabic), the ancient town named in the *Talmud* as Gush-Heleb,[61] meaning 'fat ground.' The interpretation listed in the *Midrash Rabbah* note is, however, not quite clear. The first part of the name is the Hebrew word *gûwsh* (*gîysh*),[62] meaning 'a clod or mass of earth,' and the second part *cheleb*,[63] meaning 'fat.' The word *chalab*,[64] meaning 'milk,' could probably also be used as the second part of the name, but both end with the consonant *b*, which is absent in the name Gischala. However, there are other Hebrew words phonetically similar to ***chala***, namely *châlâ'*,[65] meaning 'to be sick, be diseased'; *châlâh*,[66] 'to be weak, sick,

afflicted, to grieve'; and *qâlâh*,[67] 'to toast, scorch partially or slowly, to roast, loathsome.' None of these interpretations would make sense in terms of ***gis*** referring to a clod.

Gischala, Not a Town But an Alias for Christ

It is certainly possible that Josephus interpreted the 'of Gischala' part of John's appellation as referring to his hometown and continued to use this name throughout his texts. Recalling, however, that *Nerges* means 'Lord of the Penis' in Sumerian, one might be tempted to look for a Sumerian interpretation of Gischala. This is readily to be found, namely *Gis*, meaning 'penis,' *ka*,[68] meaning 'mouth,' and *la*,[69] meaning 'youthful, wish, desire' or *la*,[70] meaning 'to penetrate, pierce, force a way into,' with the inference '**Penis in the mouth**.' It would seem that Christ enjoyed referring to himself by these vulgar Sumerian descriptions, his disciples being none the wiser. Christ grew up 'in the East,' which may have included Sumeria, or he probably would have become familiar with the Sumerian language during his adolescence. A less likely possibility would be 'penis roaster,' from the Sumerian word *Gis* and the Hebrew *qâlâh*. The savagery of Christ and his disciples is described in section 9.4.

Similarities between John the Beloved and John of Gischala

There are several other aspects of the lives of John the Beloved and John of Gischala that can be linked:

- John of Gischala was known as the son of Levi. Matthew, the disciple of Christ, was also known as Levi. It is therefore most likely that Christ called Matthew 'Zebedee,' his Wolf, and that his son was John the Beloved.
- John the Beloved was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment,[71,72] as was John of Gischala after his capture.[73]
- From Josephus's notes it seems that John of Gischala had at some stage operated in the land of Tyre, where he gathered

his fighters. The Tyrians later attacked and burned down his hometown, most likely as revenge for the acts of terror he had committed in their country. John the Beloved was evidently accustomed to burning villages, as he casually asked Christ whether they should burn the city of Samaria.
- Regarding John of Gischala and his followers:

> For these Galileans had advanced this John, and made him very potent, who made them suitable requital from the authority he had obtained by their means; for he permitted them to do all things that any of them desired to do, **while their inclination to plunder was insatiable, as was their zeal in searching the houses of the rich; and for the murdering of the men, and abusing of the women, it was sport to them**. They also devoured what spoils they had taken, together with their blood, **indulged themselves in feminine wantonness**, without any disturbance, till they were satiated therewith; **while they decked their hair, and put on women's garments**, and were besmeared over with ointments; and that they might appear very comely, they had paints under their eyes, **and imitated not only the ornaments, but also the lusts of women**, and were guilty of such intolerable uncleanness, **that they invented unlawful pleasures of that sort**. And thus did they roll themselves up and down the city, **as in a brothel-house**, and defiled it entirely with their impure actions; nay, **while their faces looked like the faces of women**, they killed with their right hands; and when their gait was effeminate, they presently attacked men, and became warriors, and drew their swords from under their finely dyed cloaks, and ran everybody through whom they alighted upon.[74]

In other words, they indulged in transsexual or homosexual intercourse. As discussed in section 8.1, Christ had turned the very young John the Beloved into his homosexual lover.

- John the Beloved lived until the time of Trajan (ca. 98 CE), while John of Gischala was captured around 70 CE and presumably lived a long time afterwards, as Josephus does not mention his death. The final stages of the lives of John the Beloved and John of Gischala therefore coincide.
- Josephus describes John of Gischala as a young, poor man who began with petty theft but eventually became the most brutal, bloodthirsty, and cruelest of all the savages who ravaged Israel. John and his followers plundered the rich, **searching their houses**, murdering the men, and **raping the women** '**as if it were a sport**.' That this John was indeed John the Beloved is confirmed by a story told by the John the Beloved himself. In this story by Clement as related by Eusebius,[75,76] John, who had just been released from prison after the death of Domitian, came across a youth who was 'of fine stature and graceful countenance.' He entrusted the care of this youth to a bishop, who 'educated, restrained, cherished, and at length baptized him' but afterwards neglected the youth. Certain 'idle, dissolute' young men then befriended the youth, at first leading him on with '**expensive entertainments**.' The youth ganged up with these men, who were 'familiar with every kind of wickedness.' At night **they would go out to plunder**, and the youth grew in confidence. He eventually formed them into a band of robbers and became their captain, '**surpassing them all in violence, blood, and cruelty**.' John later confronted the youth, who was overcome with shame. John 'interceded with Christ' for him; the man then lamented bitterly to John, who embraced him and 'found pardon for him in his prayers at the hands of Christ.'

  This story echoes that of John of Gischala, who was poor at first (the youth was lured into the group of thugs by expensive entertainment, suggesting that he was poor) and became a petty thief (the youth joined the others in thievery at night). John of Gischala 'had not his fellow in wicked practices,' while the youth 'surpassed them all in violence, blood, and cruelty.' John of Gischala 'got together a band of four hundred men' and became their leader, while the youth formed his friends into a band of robbers and became their captain.

  The bishop who had cherished the youth symbolises Christ, who after his crucifixion deserted John for Mary Magdalene. John forgave the youth as he certainly hoped that Christ would one day pardon him.
- Simon (Peter) resented John (the Beloved), while Simon (bar Gioras) was at war with John (of Gischala).

9.3 Lazarus (Eleazar ben Simon Boethus?)

During the events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, three factions fought one another, namely the *sicarii* under Simon bar Gioras, the faction commanded by John of Gischala, and the zealots under the leadership of Eleazar ben Simon.[77] As mentioned before, the name Lazarus is the Latin form of the Hebrew name Eleazar,[78] and it is perhaps no coincidence that he was the son of one Simon. Given the prominence of Lazarus, the son of Simon Boethus, in the early life of Christ, it is very likely that Eleazar was the son of Simon Boethus. It would then seem that Christ had mentored his young followers into becoming leaders in the Jewish community, albeit not the kind of leaders they necessarily desired to have. All three groups opposed the Romans, which was also the primary objective of Jesus Christ.

It should be noted that Eleazar ben Boethus was made a high priest around 4 BCE.[79] A man had to be at least twenty years old before he could become a priest[80] (Aristobulus, the son of Alexandra and sister of Mariamne I, was appointed as high priest when he was only seventeen years old[81]), which means that Eleazar ben Boethus would

have been at least ninety-four years old when the siege of Jerusalem took place in 70 CE. This improbable age would seem to disqualify Eleazar ben Boethus as being the same person as the zealot leader. Lazarus's sister Martha was, however, still alive during the Jewish war,[82] and it would seem that Lazarus was younger than both his sisters, Mary Magdalene and Martha. Josephus states that Eleazar ben Simon was of priestly descent[83] (Simon Boethus was a former high priest of the Jews), which would accord with Eleazar ben Simon being Christ's Lazarus. Perhaps Josephus had incorrect information about when, if at all, Eleazar had officiated as high priest, or alternatively Simon Boethus may have had another son called Eleazar, perhaps by a second wife or if his first son of that name had died.

9.4 The Violent Acts of the Apostles

If, as argued above, Christ and his followers had turned to violence after his crucifixion, one would hope to find some evidence of this about-face somewhere in either Christian or apocryphal literature. Specifically, one would be looking for evidence of Simon Peter as Simon bar Gioras torturing and murdering people and also of John the Beloved as John of Gischala, who searched the houses of the rich for young women to rape, doing the same. John of Gischala recruited his followers in Syria, evidently in such a violent manner that the Syrians later attacked and burned down his hometown. Josephus, in fact, records that the Jews laid waste to Syrian villages during the buildup to the final revolt against the Romans and the siege of Jerusalem,[84,85] so one would be looking for evidence of the disciples of Christ being active in Syria. Finally, one should look for evidence linking either Christ or his alias, Paul of Tarsus, to violent deeds.

Apart from what is written in the New Testament, there are relatively few other sources about the lives of the close followers of Christ. One such source is to be found in the Ethiopic text of the Gadla Hawaryat, preserved in the British Museum and translated and published by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1901. He called his translation

The Contendings of the Apostles: Being the Histories of the Lives and Martyrdomes and Deaths of the Twelve Apostles and Evangelists. Other useful snippets appear in the *Golden Legend* traditions of the apostles, as well as some of the apocryphal 'acts' of the disciples of Christ.

I purchased a reprinted copy of *The Contendings* for the simple purpose of learning more about the lives of the apostles in an attempt to understand how the legend of Christ had come about. When I had finished the laborious task of working through the book, I was left stunned. It did not reveal the lives of pious men preaching Christ's message of love, but instead, behind a thin veil of divine actions and miracles are to be found numerous accounts of savagery, cruelty, bloodshed, and destruction perpetrated by the very apostles of Christ. There will no doubt be many who reject these accounts as falsifications, but they fully accord with the violent men of Christ presented in this treatise. One must again ask why such bloody legends would have been invented about men who were supposed to love their enemies.

The pattern common to many of these records is as follows:

- A city is approached by an apostle and one or two associates. Their presence in the city causes turmoil and fear amongst its inhabitants, specifically its governor and elders.
- The evil governor has the apostles arrested and punished in one way or another—either tortured or put to death.
- In some instances many of the city's inhabitants are killed before the rest accept the faith of the apostles.
- The apostles perform miracles, and all the inhabitants of the city 'believe.'
- The wife of the governor sometimes leaves her husband to join the apostle, causing the governor to rage. However, more often than not, the family members of the governor die, sometimes by his own hand, but they are revived by the apostles. The

governor then also 'believes' and gives all his earthly possessions to the poor. There were probably no banks in Israel at the time of Christ, and all one's wealth would have been kept at home. Giving it all away would mean becoming one of the poor oneself, an extremely unlikely voluntary deed.

- Of those who were 'converted' and would leave with the apostles, wives and virgins are often mentioned specifically.
- Not mentioned specifically, many of the 'converts' would have joined the rebel army of Christ. The majority of them would have been the poor and freed criminals and slaves. Christ as Josephus's Egyptian had gathered together an army of thirty thousand savages, with which he intended to free Israel from Roman occupation.

Keeping in mind that there is no such thing as a miracle—specifically not the ridiculous miracles supposedly performed by the apostles—it would seem that the apostles used these stories to inform the others, including Christ parading as Paul, of what they had achieved. They would have understood exactly what each story meant, but anyone who intercepted and read the message would simply have regarded it as a fictional account by overzealous Christians, very much like scholars apparently do today. It would seem that many of these stories survived either in oral tradition or in texts now lost and were written down by later Christians.

Some of these stories, together with my interpretation of the events they describe, are summarised below. Appropriately, I begin with the deeds of Paul (Christ) himself.

The History of the Contending of Saint Paul: Paul in Iconium[86]

Paul and Philip went to the city of Iconium (Konya in present-day Turkey) to preach salvation by Christ. They were so popular that the people of the city 'gave the apostles their children,' that they might teach them philosophy. Thewodas, the governor of the city and prince

of the people, was an evil and wicked man in all his acts and deeds. His wife's name was Euphemia, and they had a little son whom they wished to send to the apostles for instruction and accordingly invited them home. Satan, however, intervened and appeared to Thewodas in the form of a 'man of rank' with his attendants. His name was Daryanos, the king of Medon, who had in advance sent his firstborn son Asmenatos and his chief counsellor Ramrael to warn Thewodas against the apostles as follows:

> For they are sorcerers, and they have subverted my rule, **and have wrought deeds of shame among my women**, and scattered abroad my officers and soldiers, and overthrown my house, **and plundered my city, and stolen my possessions**, and blotted out my hope, and done away my goods, and destroyed my pasture, and they have made accusations against each other, **and they have carried off my handmaidens**.

Daryanos demanded that the apostles be tortured and killed, otherwise he would himself:

> send and plunder your country, and will lay waste to your cities and all your border,…and I will lay waste to all your lofty buildings, and give the people thereof to slaughter, and I will make your sons and daughters captives,…**and I will give power to my men to defile your women.**

Naturally, the people immediately bowed down before Satan. The two apostles were by now accustomed to resting in the garden of Thewodas and being ministered to by his wife, who 'sat at their feet' in order to be 'instructed.' The evil Satan stirred the people against the two by telling them, 'I have seen Paul and Philip, and with them were wine and flesh and fish, and Theodore, the son of Thewodas,

was going in front of them, and they were following him until they came to his house. And besides, **I saw a certain woman who was of most beautiful form and face, and appearance**, and Paul was holding her right hand, and Philip was holding her left.'

Thewodas was informed that the apostles and '**the woman who is a harlot**' were in his house, and he 'became exceedingly angry, and his anger burned like fire, and he plucked out the hairs of his head and beard….' He rushed over to his house, where one of the servants of Satan changed into the form of the woman of beautiful face and form, met him at the entrance to his courtyard, and informed the seething Thewodas that they had been having a most enjoyable time, one with the other. His suspicions about the apostles casting spells on men's wives were thus confirmed, and he lamented that his wife had been 'defiled by their sorceries.' He rushed back to the other leaders of the cities, informed them of what had happened and then rushed back to his house. There he found Paul and Philip lying down asleep with his wife at their feet. She was washing their feet and reciting what the apostles had taught her. He was so infuriated that he promptly strangled her and proceeded to drag his son outside, taking 'a sword which was hanging up in the house, and having drawn it out of its sheath he plunged it into the side of his son, and his bowels came out and he yielded up his soul straightway.'

The apostles were arrested and subjected to various kinds of torture, including being roasted alive. However, they survived unscathed, and the people believed. The apostles later restored to life both the wife and the son of Thewodas; all the men of the city fell down and worshipped at the feet of the apostles; and their household idols 'came down from their thrones.' Thewodas 'brought forth all his possessions and laid them at the feet of the apostles,' and after a stay of three months, the city 'believed.'

Interpretation

It is not difficult to recognise the truth behind the story of Paul and Philip in Iconium. The accusations brought against the 'apostles' were true, and everything that had happened to Daryanos also happened to Thewodas. Paul and his 'harlot,' Mary Magdalene, had walked hand-in-hand with Philip to the governor's house, followed by their savages. There they found the governor's wife, who had either just prepared a meal for her husband or was forced to prepare something to eat for her uninvited guests. There can be little doubt that Philip proceeded to rape the woman, either before her husband was brought to his house or in his presence. He must have been captured somewhere and was brought to his house, where he was forced to witness the strangulation of his wife and the disembowelment of his son. It very much seems that Paul (Christ) himself performed the slaying of this child. The children who were 'given' to the apostles for teaching would have been the young girls and handmaidens carried off by the disciples of Christ. There was no goodwill in any of these visits to a city.

The History of the Contending of Saint Paul: Paul in Thessalonica[87]

When Paul visited Halb (Aleppo in present-day Syria), he and his companion were confronted by Arestos, the captain of the guard, who proceeded to arrest them for sacrifice to the gods of the city. They were placed under supervision of an officer called Timothy, whose mother died shortly after the arrest. An angel of Christ opened the gates of their prison and freed them from their chains and fetters. The inhabitants of the city were in tumult because of their escape and also because of Paul's resurrection of the deceased mother of Timothy. The captain ordered all the people to gather at the city temple, numbering eighteen thousand men, excluding women and children. Paul and his companion and also Timothy were thrown into a massive fire,

but they managed to walk around in the fire without being affected. Arestos threatened the onlookers that unless they fell down to worship the god of that city, they would all be cast into the fire. When Paul, his companion, and Timothy emerged unscathed from the fire, Arestos begged Paul's forgiveness, and he and his soldiers went to collect all his possessions and distributed them amongst the poor. All the people were baptised, and the city temple was converted into a church for Christ.

Interpretation
The city was in turmoil from the moment the inhabitants spotted Paul and his followers approaching. The city elders left it to the city guard to try to stop them, but the captain of the guard was robbed of all his possessions, and the mother of his second-in-command was murdered, most likely before his eyes. It is possible that the eighteen thousand men who were assembled at the city temple were in fact burnt to death, while the women and children were taken as slaves.

The History of the Contending of Saint Paul: Paul in Accho[88]
When visiting the city of Accho, the elders of the city arrested Paul and his companion Sakentes and brought them to the hall of judgement. The proceedings were attended by more than twelve thousand men and women, who suggested various tortures for Paul and Sakentes (Secundus), which they survived unscathed. The governor of the city commanded them to be burned alive in brazen bulls (an ancient torture device made of bronze, in which people were roasted to death). However, while they were in the fire, Jesus Christ himself came down from heaven, together with the archangels Michael and Gabriel, 'and flashings of fire went forth…and it went into all the city and passed through the houses and habitations of the people who were foes to the apostles and burned them up, and destroyed all their possessions.'

The terrified officers and elders of the city and those who escaped this destruction beseeched God, when a voice from heaven said, 'Gather yourselves together…in the hall of judgement,…but if you tarry…the fire will not leave one man of this city alive, nay, it shall consume from the greatest of them even unto the least, and every animal that is in this city.' The people cried for mercy from God, a talking lion commanded Paul and Sakentes to step out of the furnace of the brazen bulls, and the people of the city believed.

Interpretation
This city was attacked, and all its leaders were burned to death. Fearing total annihilation, the inhabitants 'converted' and became believers in Christ.

The History of the Contending of Saint Paul: Paul in Ephesus[89]
Paul performed numerous healings and other miracles in the city, including making the statue of its goddess Artemis fall down on her face. The elders of the city were exceedingly angry, and its governor ordered Paul to be thrown to the lions. The lioness sent to attack Paul saw Christ standing between Paul and her, and she raised her voice to condemn the elders of the city, 'Woe be unto you, O ye judges of this city...' Another lion was sent against Paul, but at his command it lay down at his feet. The people cried to Paul, 'Do not to deliver us into the mouth of this fierce, ravening, and destroying lion, that he may destroy us and make an end of us and rend us limb from limb.' They confessed their belief in Christ and were spared.

Interpretation
As in other stories of this nature, Paul appeared in public and warned the citizens of what would befall them should they not submit to him. In this case the city appears to have submitted without offering any resistance. Whether the city in question really was Ephesus is rather doubtful. It is possible, if not likely, that Christians later claimed that

this famous city, too, succumbed to Paul, purely because of its significance at that time.

Accusations Brought against Paul

It would seem that whenever a city was attacked, its leaders were rounded up and killed, and their possessions and women were distributed amongst the 'followers' of Christ. During his trial Paul admitted to having imprisoned and killed people: 'Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them into prison,'[90] and 'I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.'[91] In other words, Paul was accused of the murder of people, exactly as attested by these legendary accounts of his actions.

In *The Acts of Paul*,[92] Paul is accused of depriving young men of wives and maidens of husbands, by teaching, 'Otherwise there is no resurrection for you, except you remain chaste and do not defile the flesh but keep it pure.' He is also accused of having destroyed the city of Iconium and having 'corrupted' the wives of its inhabitants. Just what Paul as Christ preached when he was younger we can only guess, but as Simon Magus, it was definitely not chastity. It would seem, however, that with his execution in Rome fast approaching, he reflected upon his life and concluded that the basis of all his sins was sex, and in his letters to his sects, he advised that it is best avoided. The many young women who were taken from their husbands were dragged off kicking and screaming, as discussed in chapter 10.

The Preaching of Saint John the Evangelist[93]

Saint John arrived at a city of the Ephesians, whose governor Dioscorides owned a 'house of washing' (a public bath). Dioscorides had a son, who in the words of Prochorus, the companion of John, was 'exceedingly handsome in stature and appearance.' After the apostles had been visiting the bathhouse for three months, the boy went there to bathe and was followed by Prochorus. Satan took hold of the young man and strangled him, evidently in the presence of

Prochorus. When Dioscorides received the news of the death of his son, he 'fell down on the ground' and died. John promptly restored the boy and his father to life, and an ever-grateful Dioscorides offered all his possessions to John. During this process, two hundred men were struck with terror and died. They, too, were miraculously revived, to the amazement of all. Satan in the guise of an officer later brought John and Prochorus before the city elders because of 'the wickedness of their deeds, which was very great.' The people, being the Jews, threatened to burn down the now-converted governor's house, plunder his possessions, and slay him and his children. The Jews expelled John and Prochorus from the city, but they returned, and 'all the temples in that place fell down.'

Interpretation

As usually was the case, both the governor and his son ended up dying, with the apostle taking all their possessions. The city must have offered resistance, and two hundred men were killed. All the temples in the city were destroyed. Of particular interest here, however, is the mention of the beautiful son of the governor. Given John's sexual orientation, it is very likely that he chose as his companion another homosexual, and that Prochorus had sexually assaulted the boy before strangling him to death. The accusations brought against John and Prochorus were of course true, as were the allegations of the king of Medon made against Paul. The 'very great wickedness' of John and his companion matches Josephus's description of John of Gischala as the cruelest of all.

The Preaching of Saints Andrew and Philemon amongst the Kurds[94]

When Andrew and Philemon, the son of Philip, visited Lydia, they were confronted by Rawekas, its governor. Satan commanded an evil spirit to possess the wife of the governor and instruct her to kill her own son, which she did. Andrew raised the child from the dead, and he 'bowed himself down between the hands of Andrew.' Andrew

calmed the wife of the governor, and she sat down 'between his hands.' Andrew evidently then instructed all those present to leave the house and return only the next morning. The governor instructed all his possessions to be brought to Andrew and to be given away to the poor.

Interpretation
As there in reality was no devil to possess the wife of the governor, one must assume that Andrew strangled the child before the hysterical young woman and then spent the night with her. As before, the governor was robbed of all his possessions; his son was murdered; and his wife was violated. She must have been so beautiful that Andrew selected her for himself.

The Acts of Saints Andrew and Bartholomew amongst the Parthians[95]
Lydia, the wife of the governor of Bartos, was visited by the apostles Andrew and Bartholomew, was possessed by an evil spirit, and stoned to death all those in her house. She was healed by Bartholomew and pledged that she would not leave the apostles. A group of the inhabitants of the city accused the apostles of being sorcerers 'who go round about through all countries **and make separation between husband and wife**' and urged that they be sent away from the city lest '**they separate us from our wives and children**.' The governor, who had earlier commanded the apostles to be killed, and all the inhabitants of the city offered the apostles 'what possessions ye wish for,' if only they would leave the city, which they did. While resting in the desert outside the city, Christ sent them a 'dog-faced' man who would accompany them back to Bartos. The governor was notified of their approach and shut the city gates, posting guards to protect the gates. The dog-faced man commanded the gates to open, but the apostles were met by the men of the city, who rushed towards them carrying swords, spears, shields, bows, and whatever weapons they could

find. The governor confronted the apostles, provoking the wrath of the dog-faced man, who tore into the people, killing seven hundred men and three of the nobles of the city. The rest fled and went into hiding. The governor called on all the citizens to gather and surrender in faith to the apostles, bringing with them their gods, to be destroyed.

Interpretation
This city was approached by Andrew, who entered and demanded its surrender. When the leaders of the city refused, Andrew withdrew to the desert, where he gathered his army of savages (the 'dog-faced man') and attacked the city. The men of the city fought in vain, and hundreds of them were killed. The governor's wife, who supposedly stoned to death all of those in her house, presumably also her own children, was forced to watch all her family members being stoned to death by the apostles. Her invitation to them—to stay over at her house—implies that she met the same fate as the wife of Rawekas. In other words, Andrew took particular delight in killing the children of the wives of governors before their eyes and then spending the night with them.

The Life of Saint Andrew[96]
In *The Life of Saint Andrew*, we encounter several curious episodes. We read of a young man, a follower of Andrew, whose parents had set their house on fire. The young man miraculously put out the fire, but his parents were blinded and died within forty days.

Interpretation
In reality it could simply be an account of the house of an elderly couple who had been blinded and left to die in their house, which had been set on fire.

A wealthy and sinful old man named Nicholas was confronted by the apostle, who made him fast for six months, surviving only on bread and water.

Interpretation
It would appear that the old man was simply made to slowly starve to death.

In another tale the mother of an attractive young Christian man wanted her son to have sex with her. When he refused, she went to a judge and had him condemned. The judge ordered the son to be put into a sack to be sealed with glue and thrown into the river. For some reason Andrew was also arrested and imprisoned, but a thunderbolt invoked by Andrew killed the woman, the earth shook, and Andrew was released by the now-converted judge.

Interpretation
Reading between the lines, it seems that the young man was forced to rape his own mother, after which she was killed, and he was drowned in a river as described.

Finally, Andrew was crucified by Aegeas, the provost and judge of a town called Achaia. Andrew had converted and baptised Maximilla, the wife of this judge, who was upset about his wife having become a Christian. He knew about this faith, which the princes of Rome had commanded to be destroyed, and eventually had Andrew executed. On his way back to his house, Aegeas was ravished by a devil.

Interpretation
We here again have the now familiar theme of an apostle of Christ taking the wife of a governor of the town. It would seem, however, that he was eventually caught and executed for his crimes in the town.

The Preaching of Saint Bartholomew in the Oasis[97]
Bartholomew was commanded by Christ to preach salvation in the land of the country of the Oasis. He was accompanied by Peter, and along their way they met a wealthy merchant, who was also a

nobleman, travelling with ten camels. When they informed this man of their mission, he responded that he knew about them, and that they could not be allowed into his country because they 'lead astray the people **and separate wives from their husbands**,' as had happened to a friend of his. The apostles left him but disguised themselves and fooled the merchant into giving them a ride into his country.

Peter sold Bartholomew as a slave to the man but secretly gave the money to Bartholomew. They then departed for Oasis. Along the way all the camels mysteriously died, only to be resurrected by Bartholomew. Bartholomew made withered vines bear fruit, which so impressed the nobleman and his friends that they fell down before Bartholomew. Bartholomew then revealed that he was a servant of Jesus Christ. Shortly thereafter the nobleman was bitten by a snake and died, but he was resurrected by Bartholomew, prompting everyone who was with him to convert to this new faith. Bartholomew remained in the city for three months before departing to two great cities called Nasmefin and Niendos (Naidas).

Interpretation
The episode of Bartholomew encountering a wealthy merchant travelling with his camels and ending up with his money is consistent with the way of life of his father, Tholomy, whom Josephus describes as being an arch-robber. The account of the companions of the merchant who became 'believers' when they witnessed his death suggests that these men subjected themselves to Bartholomew only because they feared for their own lives.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew in Naidas[98]
In Naidas **the wife** of King Akrepas heard the preaching of the apostle and '**departed from his** [the king's] **bed** and from pollution by the king.' The king was angry 'with a great anger' and commanded the apostle to be apprehended and killed. Bartholomew was placed in a bag partially filled with sand and was thrown into the sea to drown.

Interpretation

This is another episode in which the wife of a king was taken from him, with the result that the king eventually caught up with the apostle and had him executed.

The Preaching of Saint Thomas in India[99]

In this legend the conversion of Arsonwa, the wife of Lukiyos, the governor of a city, is recounted. Thomas preached the faith of Jesus Christ to Arsonwa, upon which the gods in the house 'fell down,' and she 'feared exceedingly,' falling 'between the hands' of the saint. Having been converted, she 'threw off her beautiful apparel,' and all the men of the city 'became believers.' Upon his return, Lukiyos found his wife dressed in 'wretched apparel' and was greatly grieved by it, for he believed that 'thieves had stolen everything he had in his dwelling.' He spoke to his wife 'according to the custom of the men of this world, concerning union with her.'

Lukiyos, whose heart was 'filled with the wrath of Satan,' ordered Thomas to be flayed. His wife died when she witnessed the apostle being flayed from a hidden window in her house but was resurrected when Thomas draped her in the skin they had flayed off him. Thomas lent out his skin to others who had lost their loved ones, receiving it back when their dead had likewise been raised. He continued to carry his skin around his neck while still in the city. Only when he left the city, did Christ 'array his body therein,' so that Thomas was restored to his former state.

Interpretation

The wife of the governor was ordered to undress and was raped by Thomas, if not by others of his following. The man who had been flayed was not Thomas but the governor. Thomas must have particularly enjoyed draping his intended victims in the skin of the governor before killing them. The men of the city 'believed,' only because of their fear that the fate of the governor's wife would befall their own wives.

The Acts of Saint Thomas in India[100]

When Thomas and a merchant called Abnes entered a city in India, the king of the city was having a festival for celebrating the marriage of his daughter. He had commanded all—rich and poor, stranger and citizen—to attend the marriage feast or risk being punished. Thomas joined the feast, but his odd behaviour prompted a fellow guest to strike him. Thomas threatened that dogs would carry off the very hand that had struck him, a prophecy that was promptly fulfilled. The king, having heard of this happening, took Thomas to the chamber of the bride to pray for his daughter. The bridegroom eventually arrived and drew back the curtains of the bridal chamber, only to find Jesus Christ in the form of Judas Thomas conversing with the bride. Thomas then spoke to both of them, and when they had heard these words, 'they believed in the Lord, and gave themselves unto him; and forsook the impurity of their lust, and they remained as they were in that place the whole night praying.'

Interpretation

The notion that a king would force all the inhabitants of the city to join in the festivities of his daughter's marriage is ridiculous. It would rather seem that Thomas and his men had stormed into a city when the feast had just begun. To use a colloquial expression, they gatecrashed the wedding, and those who opposed them were slaughtered. The king was forced to take Thomas to the bridal chamber, where he sat talking to the terrified young woman until her bridegroom was brought in. It would seem that he then spent the night with the bride, while her bridegroom was forced to watch.

From there Thomas and Abnes went to a king called Gondaforus. The king gave the apostle money to build him a palace. Thomas received the money and gave it all to the poor. The wrathful king had Thomas arrested and was planning to execute him when his brother died. Thomas raised him from the dead, and he petitioned the king, his brother, who was swayed and was prepared to give him all his possessions.

Interpretation
A king was robbed by 'the poor' of all his possessions, with his brother killed in the process.

The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew in Scythia[101]
Andrew entered a city in which he began preaching but was opposed by wicked men who attempted to burn him in the place where he was staying. Andrew retaliated by commanding fire from heaven to burn them, and they were killed. Those who remained feared that he would '**separate us from our wives**' and devised a cunning plan to capture Andrew. Having succeeded, Andrew was thrown into prison to be killed. He pleaded with God **to make fire from heaven burn up the three cities** that had rejected him, but was told by Christ that his mission had been completed, and he was crucified.

Interpretation
Andrew attacked a city and managed to burn part of it, but the men, knowing the fate of their women should they surrender or be defeated, fought back. They were joined by men from two nearby cities (the cunning plan), and together they managed to defeat Andrew and his army of savages. Andrew was captured and killed.

The Martyrdom of Saint James the Just[102]
The wife of Jerusalem's evil governor called Ammanyos (Ananus) had been barren for twenty years and against the will of her husband, approached James for divine assistance. She promptly became pregnant, and a son was born to her, whom she called James in honour of Saint James. As a sign of her gratitude, she took 'much possessions' to James. James blessed her and her son and sent them home. The governor 'was angry with an exceedingly great anger because his wife had done (this thing).' James was captured and executed.

Interpretation
The execution of James the Just by Ananus ben Ananus was documented by Josephus,[103] according to whom James was executed for breaking the law. The account given above, however, suggests that James had probably abducted the young wife of Ananus and kept her with him until she had become pregnant with and had given birth to his son, in line with the savagery of the other disciples of Christ. He then returned her to Ananus, whose wife now had a son by his enemy. One can understand the rage of Ananus.

The Acts of Saint Andrew (Matthew) in the City of Kahenat[104]
Christ instructed his disciples Peter, Andrew, and Matthew to go to the cities of Rome, Mesya, and Kahenat, respectively. In Kahenat Matthew confronted the high priest at the city temple and prayed to god, upon which all the images of the gods fell down and were dashed into pieces. An earthquake also destroyed all the idols in the houses of the inhabitants of the city. The king of the city was not pleased with these events and ordered the arrest and burning of Matthew and the high priest, who had been 'converted.' While this was in process, the king was informed that his son had died. Matthew raised the young man from the dead, and the king, too, was 'converted,' as were the inhabitants of the city.

Interpretation
The by now familiar theme is repeated: the king (governor) of the city attempts to have the apostles killed, but his own son dies (is murdered) in the process.

The Life of Saint Matthew[105]
Matthew visited an Ethiopian city called Nadaber and stayed in the house of a queen called Candace, who had earlier been baptised by

Philip. The son of Egippus, the king of the city, somehow died but was raised by Matthew. The king had a virgin daughter called Ephigenia whom Matthew 'hallowed to God' and made the mistress of more than two hundred virgins. The king was succeeded by Hirtacus, who coveted the fair Ephigenia and requested Matthew to persuade her to accept his proposal of marriage. She, however, refused, and her house was burnt down by the king. She and her two hundred virgins were rescued by Matthew and escaped. The king's castle also went up in flames, killing all inside, except for the king and his son. His son was 'ravished by a devil,' and the king took his own life with a sword.

Interpretation

Again we have a ruler whose son was killed, supposedly only to be raised again by an apostle, causing the people to believe. Not only was the son of the ruling king murdered, but the son of his successor was also murdered. Whether the king took his own life is doubtful. It would rather seem that he was killed after having had to witness the murder of his son. The two hundred virgins are of particular interest and may have been taken from the king's harem and given to Matthew's men or were simply young women abducted from the city.

The Acts of Philip[106]

Philip preached in Athens, where he was confronted by a priest called Ananias, along with five hundred men. Ananias was blinded during the confrontation, as were his five hundred men, and Philip restored their sight as a demonstration of Christ's power. Ananias refused to believe and was gradually swallowed up by the earth. The son of one of the 'first men' of the city was suffocated by a devil, only to be raised again by Philip, so that the five hundred believed.

Interpretation

The priest and his men who opposed Philip and his hordes were blinded, and the priest was buried alive. The son(s) of the

leader(s) of the city were murdered, causing the city to surrender ('believe').

Wherever Philip went, he was repeatedly **accused of separating husbands and wives** (by preaching chastity). When he visited the city of Nicatera, he was invited into the house of a wealthy man called Ireus, who was instructed by Philip to leave his wife in order to 'cleanse his house.' Ireus was more than willing, but his wife complained bitterly, 'What is to become of our children **if we have to give up all our worldly wealth**?' Philip was nevertheless invited into the house, upon which Ireus instructed his wife to 'put off her gay robes' and come out to meet the stranger. His beautiful daughter was then also instructed to 'put off her golden-woven dress' and change into something simpler. Philip 'shone with a great light,' causing them to fear. When he returned to normal, they all believed. The Jews were not pleased and came to seize Philip, to which he responded, 'If I choose, I can blind you.' One of the leaders of the city grabbed Philip by his beard, who in response threatened that 'your hand and your ears and your right eye shall suffer for threatening me and insulting God.' The leader's 'eye became hollow as if absent, his ears pained and his right hand dangled useless.'

Interpretation

A wealthy man was chased out of his home and all his possessions taken. Philip ordered his wife and her beautiful daughter to undress, for obvious reasons. When other leaders of the city arrived, they, too, were threatened with being blinded, and a quick example was made of the leader of that group, who suffered the torture of having one eye gouged out, both ears pierced, and the sinews of one hand cut.

In the same document, we are told of a visit by Philip and Bartholomew to a city called Hierapolis of Asia. Nicanora, the partially blind wife of the proconsul, was healed by Philip, upon which her tyrant husband dragged her by the hair and threatened to kill her.

One of the apostles had been hung upside down by hooks pierced through his ankles, and the others had been hung naked by their hair. They did not feel any pain and were smilingly discussing whether they should 'call down fire from heaven,' when none other than John arrived. About seven thousand men subsequently died by being swallowed up by the earth, but Nicanora and fifty others (women who believed in Christ[107]) remained safe, as did one hundred virgins. Christ later appeared, rebuked Philip, and called the seven thousand men up from the abyss. In *The Additions to Acts of Philip*,[108] the numbers are slightly different and the description more precise: 'twenty-four wives who had fled from their husbands along with forty virgins who had not known men.'

Interpretation

The capture of this large city was particularly rewarding. The combined armies of Philip, Bartholomew, and John were powerful enough to defeat seven thousand men, and (only?) fifty wives and one hundred virgins were taken. As recorded by Josephus, John (of Gischala) was infamous for searching the houses of the rich for their women (their wives, daughters, and handmaidens). From the above narratives, it would seem that Philip took particular pleasure in blinding people.

The History of Saint Peter[109]

When Saint Peter visited Rome, he encountered a Roman prefect called Kewestos who had a wife called Akrosya. Kewestos was highly regarded amongst the Roman nobility and was a trusted advisor of the Emperor. Kewestos and his wife were so impressed with Peter's teaching that they gave away all their possessions to the poor, keeping nothing at all for themselves. The two sons of Kewestos accidentally drank poison and died. Kewestos later returned from a visit to the Emperor, only to find his sons lying dead in his (empty) treasure chamber, upon which he 'lifted up his voice and wept aloud.' Peter revived the dead and all rejoiced.

Interpretation

This story appears to follow the normal theme of a leader of a city who lost his children and all his possessions. It is, however, perhaps more than coincidence that Nero poisoned his stepbrother Britannicus and later committed suicide. Either way, there is no such thing as the revival of the dead, and one must assume that Kewestos suffered the same fate as all the other victims of Christ.

The Two Robbers Who Were Crucified with Christ

Two robbers were crucified with Christ.[110] They were, however, no ordinary 'robbers.' In 'The Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea,'[111] we find the following description of the two:

> The first, his name Gestas, put travellers to death, murdering them with the sword, and others he exposed naked. And he hung up women by the heels, head down, and cut off their breasts, and drank the blood of infants' limbs, never having known God, not obeying the laws, being violent from the beginning, and doing such deeds. And the case of the other was as follows: He was called Demas, and was by birth a Galilean, and kept an inn. He made attacks upon the rich, but was good to the poor—a thief like Tobit, for he buried the bodies of the poor. And he set his hand to robbing the multitude of the Jews, and stole the law itself in Jerusalem, and stripped naked the daughter of Caiaphas, who was priestess of the sanctuary, and took away from its place the mysterious deposit itself placed there by Solomon. Such were his doings.

Interpretation

The name Gestas appears to be derived from the Latin words *gesto gestare*,[112] meaning 'to carry,' implying to carry off women. The name Demas (also known as Dysmas) is likewise most likely derived from

the Latin word *demo demere*,[113] meaning 'to take away,' implying to rob, and he obviously had raped the daughter of Caiaphas. Her fate may also have been death by hanging upside down from a tree. It is very likely that these two were indeed followers of Christ, as their actions match those of the closest disciples of Christ, John and Simon Peter. That would also have been a good reason why they were crucified next to Christ.

9.5 What Jesus Did to the Jews

Christ made it abundantly clear that he intended to return to Israel while many of those who witnessed his preaching there were still alive. To what end? There can be no doubt that he wished to overthrow the Romans and if successful, to overthrow the elite of Jewish society as well, along with their hypocritical faith.

Just what Christ had in mind for Israel and what was done by his disciples is summarised in three documents, namely *The Apocalypse of Peter*,[114] *The Apocalypse of Paul*,[115] allegedly a forged document[116] but probably not, given the true nature of Christ as revealed in this treatise; and to an extent, in the book of Revelation in the Bible. In these documents horrors are described, which most Christians believe to be Christ's promise of punishment when he should one day, that is, during or after our present time, return to judge the dead. Although these documents all appear to have been written sometime during the first centuries of the early church, one should judge their content against the background that Christ intended to return to Israel a couple of decades at most after his crucifixion. Under these circumstances it becomes clear that Christ planned to exact revenge on the Jews, and just what he did to them appears to be summarised in these two documents. Where else would these ideas have originated?

The savagery of the apostles of Christ has already been described in the preceding sections. Cities were destroyed by fire, their leaders invariably robbed of their families and possessions, and some acts of torture were mentioned. The acts of terror promised in these

documents include numerous accounts of people being tortured, for all kinds of ridiculous offences. I must say here that what I regard as ridiculous today most certainly would have been considered serious transgressions against God in those days, but nevertheless, one would expect 'God' to be infinitely more lenient and forgiving than the human beings of those days, whose understanding was not based on any scientific facts.

In these documents there are numerous accounts of people, both men and women, being burned alive, having their eyes gouged out and lips cut off, being eaten by worms, and finding themselves submerged in lakes of discharge and excrement. In *The Apocalypse of Paul*, we find a particular group of condemned people naked, with their hands and feet cut off, in a place of ice and snow, being eaten by worms. This may give credence to the hotly disputed claim by Nicolas Notovich and his adherents that Christ as a young man visited India, Nepal, and Tibet.[117] It would appear that Christ sent Thomas to 'preach' in India, as discussed in the preceding section. It is not hard to imagine how these punishments were inflicted upon the rich and powerful of the cities taken by Christ and his apostles. Their houses were burnt and them with it. It would seem that the invading army, which could total a couple of thousand, would dig a large latrine and seal it with bitumen. All of them would use only this latrine, which would become the 'lake of excrement' into which the rich and their families would be cast. Similar holes would have been dug to cast other deceased victims in, and once rotting, people would have been thrown alive amongst the corpses, to be 'eaten by worms.' The flow of blood from amputated limbs can possibly be stopped by ice or snow, preventing the victims from rapidly bleeding to death and extending their suffering. In other words, all the sick forms of punishment described in these documents were actually inflicted upon the citizens of the conquered towns and cities, and all of them would have been instigated by Jesus Christ. It is then no wonder that Christ told his followers:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.[118]

Hate is a strong emotion, and Christ and his followers must have given the Jews ample reason to hate them.

10

The Realm of Barbelo

You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo.
—*The Gospel of Judas*

Having discussed various aspects and phases of the life of the person who became known as Jesus Christ, it is opportune to present a concluding overview of the life of this most controversial man in human history.

When Mariamne, the teenage wife of Herod the Great, had given birth to her illegitimate son, she had no choice but to fake her own death in order to save the child's life and escape Herod's clutches. Before her departure she was showered with money and gifts to ensure her survival, and when she departed to the East with three visiting astronomers, she would not see Israel again for the next thirty years.

Of the childhood of Christ, little is known, but one can speculate what it must have been like for the young boy. One can imagine that, being exceptionally short with a slightly deformed body and an ugly appearance, he would not have been popular with other children of his age, and that he would probably have been the object of ridicule wherever he went. There can be no doubt, however, that he was exceptionally intelligent, and that his mother had begun honing his oratory skills from an early age. He was, in her mind, the future king of the Jews.

It would also seem that the Magi, with whom he was being raised, introduced him to the art of illusion and taught him how to perform magic. Apart from his oratory skills, this would have been the only way in which the young Christ, then called Simon after the

father of the Hasmonean dynasty, would have been able to distinguish himself from others. He would no doubt have begun to draw curious onlookers and spectators, but what would have grieved him most would have been suffering utter rejection by women, particularly the beautiful young girls of the rich. They would probably have shrieked in horror every time he made eye contact with them, finding the thought of this little creature ever touching them unbearable. Christ's only means of sexual gratification would have been with young boys, something for which he most likely hated himself. As the years went by, his hatred towards beautiful women would only have grown more intense.

When he returned to Israel following Herod's death, he would quickly have become a major attraction, for several reasons: his odd physique, his reputation as a magician, his oratory skills, his message of compassion towards the poor, and, perhaps more than anything else, his claim to the throne of the Jews. Many may even have believed that he truly was the long-awaited Messiah, whom Isaiah had predicted would be a man of ugly appearance.

As his popularity and notoriety grew, he would have enlisted the help of others to assist him in the execution of his illusions. Initially he would have been supported by the wealthy Simon Boethus and his family, but as Christ's support grew, he would eventually have had to find another means of keeping these supporters close to him. That would have been relatively simple. His overwhelming hatred of the religious establishment and the rich made these groups ideal targets for robbery. Violence eventually became his modus operandi for turning the nonviolent Jewish communities to violent action against the occupying Romans.

From the earlier accounts of the speeches of Simon Peter and Simon bar Gioras, inviting the riffraff of Jewish society to join him (and by implication Christ) in his march against the Romans, it is clear that Christ's revolution was not only religious but also social and political. The bulk of his ragtag army of fighters would have been

social outcasts, misfits, the poor, freed slaves, escaped criminals, and the dropouts of society in general. What would have drawn these men so close to Christ—his message of love and redemption?

The key to his success in attracting fighters is to be found in the euphemism widely used by the apostles in their reports: that they were accused of '**separating husbands from their wives and children (daughters)**.' In the previous section, it was demonstrated that the success of a campaign against a city was often measured in terms of the number of wives and virgins who joined the apostles. Why these women specifically? If the new recruits were simply converts to Christianity, there should have been no mention of this particular group of women—the wives and daughters. Why not elderly women? Why not men?

Given the background of just who Christ and his disciples really were, there can be little doubt why there would have been such a particular interest in wives and daughters. Two aspects of these women should be stressed. The richest and most powerful men would have had the prettiest of the young women as their wives, and these beautiful young women would themselves have had beautiful young daughters. The 'wives' who were 'separated from their husbands' would, therefore, almost invariably have been the beautiful young wives of the rich. And the 'virgins' who so willingly left their families to join a group of roving men living off alms?

In ancient times women were most likely seen as property, and many marriages of minor girls (younger than twelve years of age) would have been arranged by their fathers through the process of betrothal.[1] The pretty girls of the rich would have been much in demand, and they could have been married off once they reached adolescence (twelve years). These were little girls, twelve years old and still clinging to their mothers, so any suggestion that young girls of this age or even a bit older would willingly and with the blessing of their parents leave everything behind is simply ludicrous. The truth behind these women joining the apostles was captured by Josephus,

who records that John of Gischala, that is John the Beloved, searched the houses of the rich for women 'to abuse.'[2] There can be no doubt that once a city came under attack, the rich knew exactly what fate was awaiting them and more specifically their women. They would no doubt have tried to hide their wealth, their young wives, their daughters, and themselves from the apostles, but to prevent this from happening, the ever-resourceful Lord Jesus had an answer.

10.1 Barbelo, the Divine Child, and Yaldabaoth

There can be no doubt that Christ's disciples often questioned him about his origins, what it was like in heaven, and what they could expect to happen to them once they died. In *The Secret Book (Apocryphon) of John*[3] we read of the birth of two male children, the first of whom is '**the self-conceived divine child**' born to 'god and father of all, called the One…the Invisible Spirit' and **Barbelo**, who 'came forth from the father's mind as the forethought of all…the image of the perfect and invisible virgin spirit' and was called 'mother-father, the universal womb and **the holy spirit**.' In other Gnostic texts, Barbelo is also referred to as a 'virginal male,'[4] the 'virginal Barbelo…who presides over the heaven…the ineffable Mother,'[5] 'the mother of the aeons,'[6] 'male virginal Barbelo…she who is called "perfect'[7] and "the perfect glory.'[8]

In *The Secret Book of John*, it is further related that the divine child, the only child (an 'only-begotten child'[9]) of the couple, was anointed by the spirit with its own goodness '**until it was perfect**.' The Invisible Spirit 'brought **the self-conceived child** of itself and Barbelo to perfection…**and caused all authority and the truth within to be subject to it**, so that the child may understand everything, **the one called by a name greater than every name**, for that name will be told to those who are worthy of it.'

We next read of the birth of an illegitimate son to Sophia, the 'wisdom of afterthought.' She wanted to conceive but had to do so without the consent of her partner. Since the male had not given his

approval, '**something came out of her that was imperfect and different in appearance from her**, for she had produced it without her partner. It did not resemble its mother **and was misshapen**.' Sophia 'cast it away from her,' and she 'surrounded it with a bright light and put a throne in the middle of the cloud **so that no one would see it** except the Holy Spirit, who is called the mother of the living. She named her offspring **Yaldabaoth**.'

Yaldabaoth 'took great power from his mother' and left her to create himself 'realms of luminous fire.' He appointed twelve authorities and seven kings to reign over the seven heavens and over the depth of the abyss, sharing his fire with them. He is referred to as the 'gloomy ruler' who had three names: Yaldabaoth, Sakla, and Samael. He was '**wicked in the mindlessness that was in him**' and said, '**I am god and there is no other god but me**.' Sophia later repented 'with many tears' **the wickedness that had occurred and the robbery that her son had committed**. Following the creation of Adam and Eve, Yaldabaoth raped Eve, fathering two sons called Elohim and Yahweh. The authorities created seven powers, who created angels until there were 365 angels.

From the description of the divine child born to the Father and the divine Mother (the Holy Spirit) he is easily recognised as Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,[10] to whom everything has been subjected[11-13] and who has a name which is above all names.[14-16] He was effectively also self-conceived, as he claimed that 'the Father and I are one.'[17]

However, from the description of Christ presented in this treatise, we also recognise Yaldabaoth as Christ, who was born out of wedlock to Mariamne I (Sophia, see section 3.2), was misshapen (see section 6.1), and was brought up in the East (see sections 3.1 and 3.3), far away from his home country ('so that no one would see it').

Mariamne intended to restore her son as the king of Judea (the 'throne' in the cloud), and Yaldabaoth and Christ both claimed to be god.[18,19] Mariamne must have groomed her son to be the next king of

Judea, and this belief may very well be the 'great power' Yaldabaoth took from his mother. Christ appointed twelve men as his apostles (the commanders of his army), while Yaldabaoth appointed twelve 'authorities' over the realm he had created and ruled by fire (see introduction to chapter 9). The robberies Christ committed and his ensuing 'wickedness' are discussed in chapter 9. That Christ himself raped women (Yaldabaoth raped 'Eve') is suggested in section 8.2.

Is any sense to be made of the stories of these two 'sons?' There can be little doubt that Christ used these narratives to distinguish between his divine form (the 'divine child' as the perfect Son of God in heaven) and Yaldabaoth, his earthly manifestation as a misshapen and wicked human being. Mariamne (Mary) must have deeply regretted her role in bringing Jesus Christ to life (Sophia's 'many tears' about her son's wickedness).

It is crucial to consider the meaning of the names Christ selected to represent himself and others in these narratives. Of particular interest is the name Barbelo, which he appears to have used to describe the perfect virgin or the perfect mother.

There seems to be no consensus regarding the etymology of the word 'Barbelo.' Various interpretations have been suggested, including[20] 'in the four is God' from the Hebrew *barba'eloh*; 'daughter of the Lord,' from the Hebrew *barah ba'lo*; 'companion of the Lord,' from the Hebrew *chaber baal*; 'the heart (spirit) has shone brightly,' presumably from Hebrew; of *bar bala*, 'virgin,' via Barthenos from a corruption of the Greek word *parthenos*; 'seed,' from the Coptic *belbile*; or simply names from the incantatory *voces magicae*, such as Barbarbelo and Berbeloch. However, a Hebrew (Aramaic) translation that seems to be rather straightforward is '**the field of the tribute**,' from *bar*,[21] meaning 'a field' or 'an open field' (associated with grain or cereals), and *b^{e}lôw*,[22] meaning 'excise, tribute.' The more familiar interpretation of the word *bar* as 'son'[23] does not make sense in the context of a tax or tribute. Just what the 'field of the tribute' might have been is not

immediately obvious but can be derived from various aspects of the reign of terror conducted by Christ and his disciples.

In *The Gospel of Thomas*,[24] we find numerous obscure statements by Christ but also several thinly veiled acknowledgements of the violence (the robbing and burning of cities, towns, and people) he committed amongst the Jews:

> I have thrown fire upon the world, and look, I am watching till it blazes.
>
> You cannot enter house of the strong and take it by force without binding the owner's hands. Then you can loot the house.
>
> Whoever is near me is near fire.

One particularly obscure text reads:

> Miryam said to Yeshua, What are your students like? He said, They are like **children living in a field** that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, 'Give our field back to us.' **The children take off their clothes in front of them** to give it back, and they return their field to them

Realistically, children would not have lived 'in a field' and even more so, would never have undressed spontaneously when approached by men who threatened them. Why use such a bizarre parable?

In *The Apocalypse of Paul*,[25] we find references to children being taken away from their parents:

> And I saw there **girls** clad in black raiment, and four **fearful angels** holding in their hands red-hot **chains, and**

they put them upon their necks (heads) and led them away into darkness. And again I wept and asked the angel: Who are these, Lord? And he said unto me: **These are they which being virgins** defiled their virginity, and their parents knew it not: wherefore without ceasing they pay the due penalty.

And I looked and saw other men and women upon a spit of fire, and beasts tearing them…and I inquired and said: Who are these men and women that are strangled in the fire and pay the penalty? And he answered me: **These are the women which defiled the creation of God when they brought forth children from the womb, and these are the men that lay with them.** But their children appealed unto the Lord God and unto the angels that are over the torments, saying: Avenge us of our parents: for they have defiled the creation of God. Having the name of God, but not observing his commandments, they gave us for food unto dogs and to be trampled on by swine, and others they cast into the river (the Coptic manuscript adds: and did not permit us to grow up into righteous men and to serve God). **But those children were delivered unto the angels** of Tartarus (Greek copy: unto an angel) **that they should bring them into a spacious place of mercy**: but their fathers and mothers were haled (strangled) into everlasting torment.

Christ also led his mother 'into a somewhat spacious region of chaos' (see section 3.2), even though she (supposedly) did not at that stage know that he was her helper, or in fact know him at all. The original language of *The Apocalypse of Paul* was Greek,[26] but this does not necessarily imply that the narrative was of Greek origin. If the text is based on actual words of Paul (Christ), it is possible that the Hebrew word *racham*[27] (a maiden, mercy) could have been mistaken for *râcham*[28]

(mercy, compassion, love), which implies that the 'spacious place of mercy' could originally have meant a spacious place of maidens (virgins). To a translator unfamiliar with the true nature of Christ, 'mercy' would have made more sense than 'virgins.' If this 'spacious place' is the same as the 'open field' of *bar bᵉlôw*, then Barbelo would mean 'the spacious place of the maidens (virgins),' in other words, an open field to which virgins were taken as tribute. But who were the dreadful 'angels' to whom they were delivered?

Epihanius recorded may of the heresies that prevailed during his lifetime. Of Simon Magus he wrote:

> And he had the nerve to call **the whore who was his partner the Holy Spirit**, and said that he had come down on her account. He said, 'I was transformed in each heaven… and descend to Ennoia—to this woman, likewise called Prunicus and Holy Spirt, **through whom I created the angels**.…'**For these angels went to war over the power from high**—they call her Prunicus, but she is called Barbero or called **Barbelo** by other sects—**because she displayed her beauty** [and] drove them wild…she brought them **to the point of slaughtering each other from the lust for her that she aroused in them**. And after detaining her so that she should not back up, **they all had relations with her in each of her womanly and female bodies**…[29]

So, the 'angels' were created by Simon Magus, and they were driven wild with lust by the sight of Barbelo's 'beauty' (her nudity). In the end all of them had sex with her in all her womanly and female bodies. This description paints a vivid picture of the ordeal that was unfolding. The 'angels' were, of course, Christ's followers, and Barbelo in her naked womanly bodies represents young women who were led to the open field outside the city gates, where they were stripped and displayed to Christ's savages before being gang-raped, probably

to death. The most beautiful ones would have become the companions of the leaders in Christ's army.

Confirmation of this interpretation of the name Barbelo is to be found in the meaning of the names Yaldabaoth, Sakla, and Samael, as discussed above. Yaldabaoth has been interpreted as[30] 'child of chaos' from the Hebrew *yalad* (child) and *baoth* (chaos), 'Lord God of the fathers' from the Hebrew *ya el dabahoth*, (ruler of the God of the desire) from *ya el taboth*, (father of Sabaoth) from *yalda 'abaoth*, and 'son of shame' from *yalda behuta*. However, the word *yaldah*[31] is the feminine of *yeled*[32] (a lad, boy, son) and means 'a lass, damsel, or girl,' and *baoth* is phonetically equivalent to *ba'ath*,[33] which means 'to be (make) afraid, terrify.' In other words, Yaldabaoth appears to mean 'Terrified girls,' or freely interpreted 'The terror of girls' ('girls of chaos' does not make any sense).

The name Sakla (also translated Saklas[34]) can be interpreted as 'weary men' from the words *sak*,[35] meaning 'a thicket of men, a crowd' and *la'ah*,[36] meaning 'to tire, be weary.' Saklas could merely be the same translation, followed by *'iysh*,[37] meaning 'man' or 'husband,' yielding 'the tired husband crowd.'

The name Samael appears to have a similar interpretation, namely 'the sweet smell of mighty men' or freely interpreted 'the (sweaty) smell of victorious men,' from the words *sam*,[38] meaning 'aroma, sweet smell' and *ayil*,[39] meaning 'strength, anything strong, a ram, mighty man.' These names, all associated with one person, appear to describe a group of men who are weary after a victorious battle and, at the same time, terrify young girls. The inference is obvious—the girls were the loot from the battle. This matches the promise of Simon Peter as Simon bar Gioras, that those who follow him would have their share of 'spoils and booties' and specifically would 'haunt whores.' Christ must have referred to the beautiful women of the rich as whores, as they would end up having sex with many men, his followers.

In *The Gospel of Judas*, Judas tells Christ:

> You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo.[40]

In other words, Barbelo represents not only beautiful women but also a 'realm' or a world in which these women exist—the realm of beautiful virgins and mothers (wives)—the virgins and wives who were 'separated from their husbands' as related in Christian legend.

It would seem that whenever a city or village was under siege, the apostles gave it an ultimatum: **surrender as tribute** the leaders and the rich of the city, along with their belongings and women or face total annihilation. During the surrender negotiations, which would have included the men of the city having to rise up against the Romans, the apostles most likely defined what they expected as tribute from a city or a village of a specific size, and if agreed to, the inhabitants would allow the apostles to enter the city without opposition. The leaders of the city and the rich would be pointed out, and nobody would dare to offer them a place to hide themselves, their women, or their belongings.

The apostles would then drag all the women from the houses of the rich, as apparently instructed by Christ. The virgins and children being led away into darkness with chains around their necks suggests that once found, the girls and possibly young boys as well were chained to each other in a long line and then led outside the city. They would have been led to an open (ploughed) field, the 'place of darkness' or 'spacious (open) place of mercy,' outside the city walls, where they would have been stripped naked and put on display for all the savages to stare at until they could no longer contain or restrain their lust. The orgy of rape that followed would almost be on the same level as those perpetrated by Genghis Khan, probably the greatest savage the world has ever seen.[41] Christ therefore motivated his fighters in the same manner that the majority of ancient wars were motivated—booty and women. What Christ offered his fighters must have been irresistible—the most beautiful young women in Israel. From the accounts discussed in chapter 9, it is clear that not all cities and

villages succumbed meekly and accepted to pay the tribute, but some had put up a fight, with dire consequences for its inhabitants.

The 'many tears' Sophia cried about the wickedness of her son suggests that when she saw what he had turned into, she deeply regretted her role in his life. His claim that he brought her into a 'spacious region of chaos' (the 'realm of barbelo') without her knowing why he had done so ('at that time not knowing him') furthermore suggests that she did not know what motivated his savagery—in his mind there probably was no other way in which the Jewish population could be forced to turn against the Romans.

That Christ was behind these savage attacks on women is suggested by an aspect of Islam that is often ridiculed by the West, namely the reward of seventy-two virgins that awaits every martyr who fought and died for Allah.[42] Mohammed, Allah's holy Prophet, was born around 570 CE,[43] a mere six hundred years after the birth of Christ. Unlike Christianity in Europe, Arab legends about Christ must have escaped cleansing by the Church, and from these Mohammed must have realised exactly who and what Jesus Christ was. He must have had long discussions about Christ with his followers, and it would seem that he attempted to counter what Christ offered his disciples, in one way or another.

It is probably more than coincidence that Christ sent seventy-two disciples (the commanders of divisions in his army) ahead of him to the cities and villages he was about to visit:

> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful…'[44]

That the harvest was indeed plentiful was discussed in the previous chapter. Simon Magus, alias Jesus Christ, finally got his revenge

against the women who had rejected him all his life, and as suggested by the incident where he had intercourse with a woman he produced from his side, he must occasionally have enjoyed this fringe benefit himself. Given the savagery of the apostles, it is then no wonder that they suffered torture and violent deaths when they were eventually caught. They did not die because of their faith in the Lord but because they were notoriously sadistic criminals.

It would seem then that Christ had offered each of his seventy-two commanders the most beautiful virgins in the flesh, a legend that was transmitted in a slightly garbled form, namely that Christ promised each of his followers seventy-two virgins. This in all likelihood prompted Mohammed to offer his martyrs seventy-two virgins as well, albeit in heaven.

10.2 The Greatest Lie Ever Told

In my book called *Thera and the Exodus*,[45] I show that the biblical Exodus can be explained in terms of natural phenomena only, and by implication, that Jehovah does not exist. Today we know that the universe is billions of years old and not the six thousand years the Bible would like us to believe.[46] The origins of the ancient stories about the Flood and the gods who subsequently ruled the earth fall beyond the scope of this book, but there can be little doubt that the belief in and hope for a 'messiah' to come, as can be found in many religions,[47] must somehow have originated from these ancient beliefs.

Ultimately, though, every belief and every legend must have a nonsupernatural origin, whether that origin may be an actual event, a distorted legend, or an outright lie. As an example of this principle, it is illustrative to take a look at the next expected 'supernatural' figure to appear, the so-called antichrist.[48] John, in his 'revelation,' states that this person will be identified by the number of the letters of his name, the so-called 'number of the beast':

> This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.[49]

If there is no 'christ,' then there certainly cannot be an 'antichrist.' Furthermore, accepting that there is no such thing as prophecy, one must look for a logical explanation for this number. There indeed happens to be a '666' that was well known during the first century—it was no more than the name of a simple game of dice. The game was played with three dice and was known in ancient times as 'Six thrice or three dice,'[50] where the winning total would be three sixes, but three dice (ones) would count as zero. In essence '666' means 'the winner takes all,' and it must have been a game regularly played by people in ancient times, due to the simplicity of constructing dice.

Based on the style and grammar of the two texts,[51] scholars have long recognised that authors of the Gospel of Saint John and the book of Revelation, also called the Revelation of Saint John, were two different people. The Revelation of Saint John also appears to be nothing more than a garbled version of Daniel's visions, as several 'visions' are common to both books, including 'the Son of man coming on the clouds,'[52,53] certainly Christ's motivation for disappearing in the clouds with a promise to return[54] (he must have slipped from sight up the mountain on a misty morning). It would therefore appear that the Revelation of Saint John was written by someone who had contact with John, possibly during John's imprisonment, and who had taken it upon himself to record John's visions about the returning Christ. He must have remembered something about the game of dice which he and John, or perhaps John and a fellow inmate, used to play and worked it into the document as it stands today. There is simply no other possible origin of this number.

So finally, if there is no messiah, no Christ, what would this make of Jesus Christ, the supposed saviour of mankind? The world owes its belief in this horrid little creature to only one entity, which is the

Roman Catholic Church. The Romans knew exactly who Jesus Christ was and no doubt attempted to suppress this emerging faith in the beginning. However, due to the many 'witnesses' who saw what they believed to be supernatural acts performed by Christ, they did not succeed and instead decided to exploit this new religion to their advantage. It is most likely that the records of the trial and subsequent actions of Jesus Christ can still be found somewhere in the Vatican, and it would seem that newly appointed heads of the Roman Catholic Church were informed about the true identity of Jesus Christ for a long time after his death. Pope Leo X (1475–1521 CE) reportedly made the statement:

> It has served us well, this myth of Christ.[55]

If true, this statement would suggest that he knew very well what Jesus Christ was all about. For all we know, all newly appointed popes are also informed about the 'myth of Christ' when they take office.

The world has seen many tyrants who were responsible for the deaths of millions of people. However, none of them has had the effect on mankind that Jesus Christ had—effects ranging from wars fought in his name; the persecution of various groups of people, including scientists, the heroes of the modern world; to personal battles with one's own beliefs. It cannot be denied that the 'myth' of Jesus Christ, more than anything or anyone else, brought us the concept of a personal God. Even though everything Jesus Christ represented was based on lies and deception, we can only hope that there may after all be a god who loves us all, not just the chosen few. What we can know for sure, however, is that Jesus Christ is the greatest lie ever told.

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Notes to references:

1. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the Bible are from the NIV Study Bible translation (see bibliography, Barker).
2. Shortened book titles are regularly used in the references, followed by the author's name. See bibliography for complete book titles.
3. SH# denotes the list number of the Hebrew word in *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (see bibliography).
4. SG# denotes the list number of the Greek word in *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*.
5. 'Life,' 'Antiquities,' 'Against Apion,' and 'War' references are from *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Whiston, Maier).
6. Rabbinic literature is quoted from *Judaic Classics* (Kantrowitz).
7. 'Clementine Homilies' and 'Clementine Recognitions' are quoted from the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (The Fathers of the Church, Clement of Rome).
8. References from *Jewish Encyclopedia* are available online at http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com.
9. The reader will note some inconsistencies regarding the manner in which Greek, Hebrew, and Latin verbs and nouns are quoted in the text. I generally chose to list only those cases or forms pertaining to the specific interpretation I want to use. Where required, more cases or forms of a particular word are listed.

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3. Matthew 2:1–18.
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Chapter 2. Joseph, Herod's Treasurer, and Mariamne I, the Parents of Jesus Christ

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If Jesus Christ was indeed the good person the Bible proclaims him to be, why did so many legends survive accusing him of shockingly terrible deeds?

Barbelo shows that the person millions of Christians think they know and love as Jesus may not, in actuality, have been the person the Good Book purported him to be. Instead, the man known in Western society as Jesus is argued to have been born in 28 BCE, from an illicit affair between Herod the Great's second wife and his treasurer, Joseph.

Standing at little more than four feet tall, with a deformed, tattoo-covered body and ugly face, Simon Magus—or Jesus, as he later came to be known—wreaked unimaginable havoc on the people of his time and created a violent, vicious legacy that history has tried to hide. But nonetheless, through testimonies of those with simple minds, these tales have lived on—and are herein uniquely told.

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Riaan Booysen is a highly accomplished engineer, academic, and author who has worked extensively over the decades to understand and appreciate ancient history and develop his own theories about the origins of the world's most mindboggling mysteries, including Atlantis, the Exodus, and Christianity.

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